ELLERY QUEEN

THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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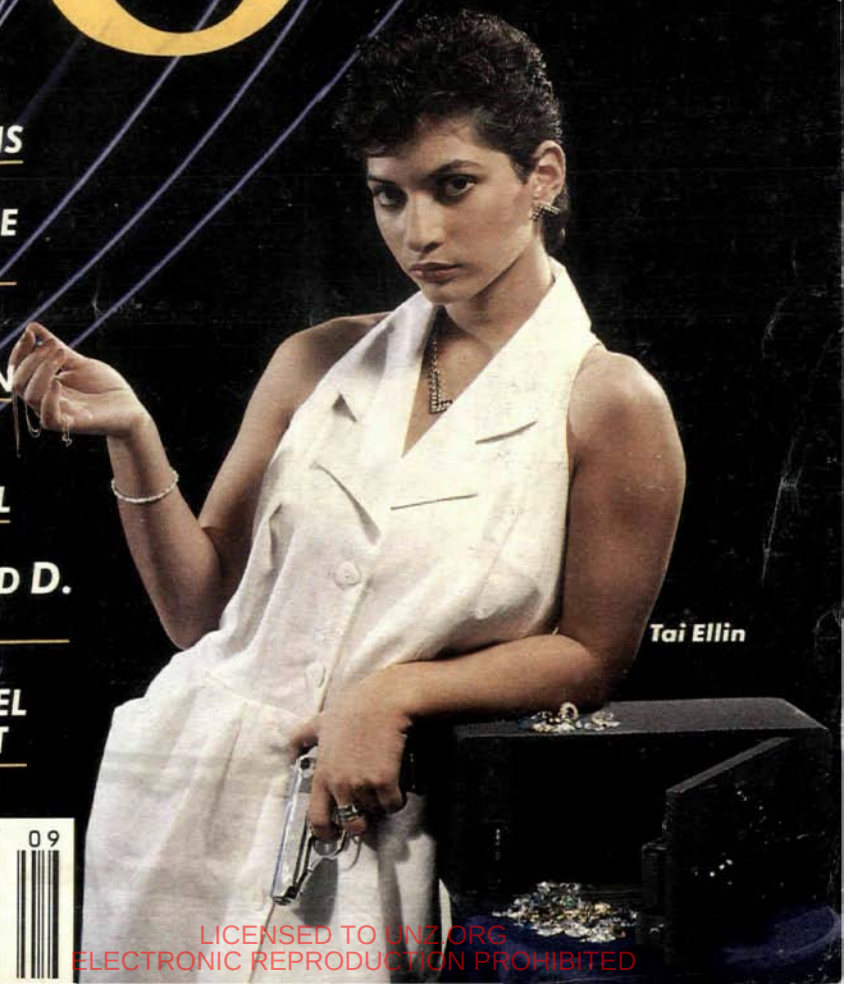

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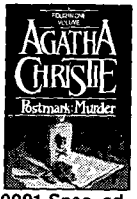

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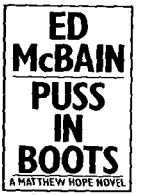

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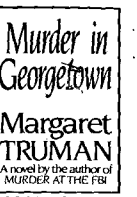

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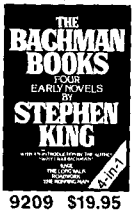

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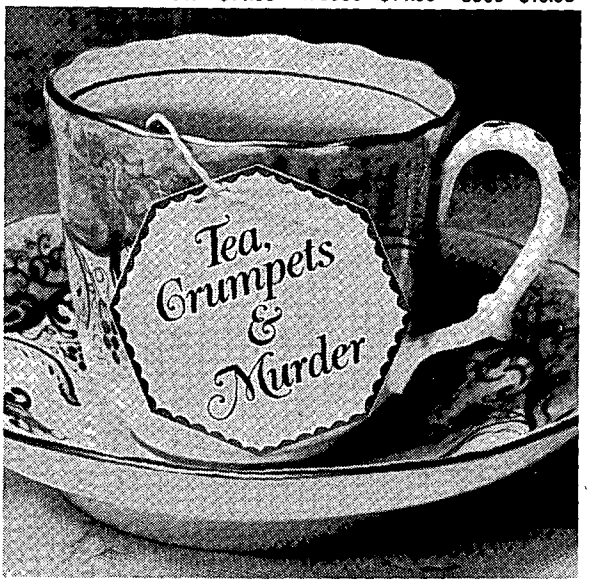

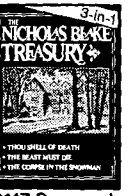

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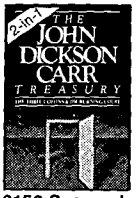

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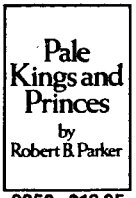

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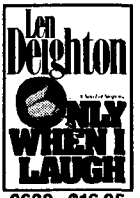

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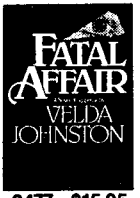

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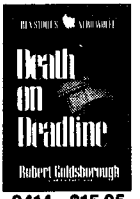

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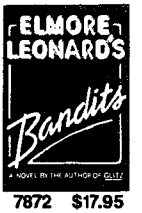

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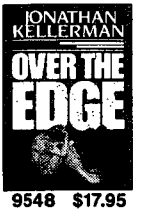

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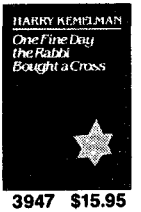

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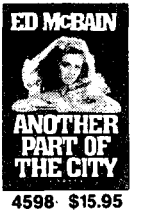

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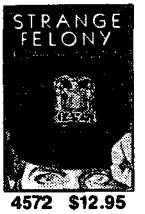

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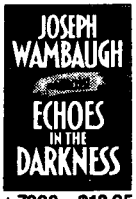

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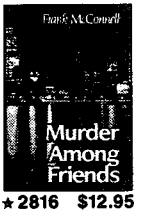

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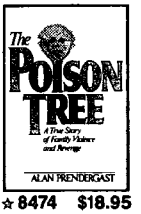

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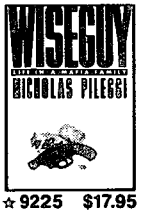

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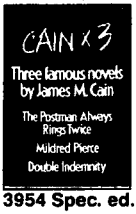

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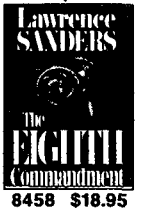

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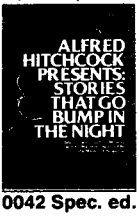

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a *NEW* Nick Velvet story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

The running of the bulls took place each morning during the week-long Fiesta of San Fermin, beginning at 8:00 A.M. *with a rocket fired from the town hall. Nick watched from a safe distance on the sidelines as nearly a thousand young men, mostly dressed in white and wearing red scarves and sashes, raced ahead of a dozen bulls along a half-mile route to the bullring.*

Your editor has a nephew who is going to love this new Nick Velvet story. He is in the habit of sending one-line postcards. One from the Mediterranean when he was stationed there with the Sixth Fleet some years ago said, "There are no *falcons in Malta." One from Sullivan, Maine, when he was vacationing there with his wife and two young sons a few summers ago said, "I knew your father." And one from Pamplona in 1973 picturing the running of the bulls said, "Everyone in this picture is drunk . . ."*

THE THEFT OF THE MATADOR'S CAPE

by EDWARD D. HOCH

During the second week of July, on an especially hot Wednesday morning, Nick Velvet crossed the border in the south of France and entered Spain in the company of a long line of cars bound for the nearby town of Pamplona and the annual Fiesta of San Fermin. Seated beside him in the little Fiat was Dominique Jadis, the woman who had brought him there by way of Paris. She was slim and dark-haired, in her late forties, with a face that had once been beautiful and was still worth a second look.

© 1987 by Edward D. Hoch.

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"This is the very route Hemingway followed," she told Nick as they passed through Customs, "when he came here with his friends from Paris to write about the running of the bulls. Have you ever been to Spain before?"

"No," he admitted, "but I've been to Paris a couple of time before. Why did you want me to meet you there rather than in Pamplona?"

"I thought the drive down would give us an opportunity to get to know each other, Mr. Velvet. When I pay someone twenty-five-thousand dollars I like to know where the money's going."

"It's going to steal the red cape of a bullfighter named Carlos San Juan for you. You've assured me the cape has no special value, that it's the same as any other matador's cape, but you haven't told me just who this man is."

She steered the car around a slow-moving truck piled high with thin layers of tree bark. "You see that? It's cork, harvested from trees in the south, on its way to processing plants in Catalonia."

"You should have been a tour guide," Nick told her. She'd been going on like that for most of the journey, offering scenic comments every time he tried to learn a few facts about his assignment.

"The house is well guarded," she said.

"What?"

"Carlos San Juan's house. It has the latest in burglar alarms. The cape won't be easy to steal."

"Leave that to me. Does he live in Pamplona the year round?"

"When he's not traveling. There are about five hundred bullfights each year in Spain, and the season lasts from March to October. Much of that time he's away from home on the weekends."

"But this week he's in Pamplona."

"Of course," Dominique Jadis replied. "From July seventh to fourteenth, everyone comes to Pamplona. He will be fighting on Sunday."

"You know a great deal about him."

"I should. He's my brother."

"Your brother! Why don't you just ask him for the cape?"

"He wouldn't give it to me. It's his lucky cape. He won't fight without it."

"I see. And you don't want him to fight."

"He's been acting—well, strange lately. His wife is very concerned. She was in Paris to see me a few weeks ago."

"How do you mean, strange?"

"Sometimes he's absent from home for days at a time without explanation. And he no longer allows her to come see him fight the

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bulls. But this is no concern of yours, Mr. Velvet. I hired you simply to steal the cape, that's all."

"Before Sunday."

"Before Sunday," she confirmed.

The running of the bulls took place each morning during the week-long Fiesta of San Fermin, beginning at 8:00 A.M. with a rocket fired from the town hall. Nick watched from a safe distance on the sidelines as nearly a thousand young men, mostly dressed in white and wearing red scarves and sashes, raced ahead of a dozen bulls along a half-mile route to the bullring, dodging the bulls' horns and occasionally fending off a charge by skillful application of a folded newspaper.

"That's the only defense they're allowed," Dominique explained. "And they can't wear any unusual costumes that might single them out for the bull's attention."

Once the runners had passed their observation point, Nick and his client strolled on through the crowds, past street venders selling red berets and scarves to anyone brave or foolish enough to join in the run. "When will I meet your brother?" Nick asked.

"We're to have dinner with him at his home tonight. I spoke to him early this morning, explaining that you're a friend and business partner over from America for a few days. I'm sure he thinks we're lovers."

"That's because he hasn't met me yet. I'm a middle-aged man."

"But a handsome middle-aged man. Are you married, Mr. Velvet?"

"Perhaps you should start calling me Nick."

"Nick. I'm sorry there's no short form of Dominique."

"To answer your question, I'm not married but I've lived with the same woman for twenty years."

"I'd like to meet her."

"Come to New York sometime and I'll introduce you. Now what about tonight?"

They arrived at the house at eight o'clock. Although the afternoon siesta had all but vanished from daily life in the north of Spain, the habit of dining late was still adhered to, especially among the wealthy. The San Juan house presented a blank whitewashed wall flush with the narrow sidewalk, its face broken only by a painted red door of heavy wood and a burglar alarm in a louvered metal box

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set high on the wall. "It looks like a bank," Nick commented in a low tone.

"Only from the outside," she assured him.

Once within the red door, Nick found himself in a luxurious courtyard filled with lush vegetation. Carlos came out of the house to greet them, accompanied by his slim, dark-haired wife, Maria. He was a tall, athletic man with large hands that gripped Dominique in a fierce bearhug. "Sister of mine! You come to visit so rarely these days! And this would be Mr.—?"

"Nick Velvet, the business partner I told you about."

"Ah, yes. The business partner." He shook Nick's hand with bone-crushing vigor. "From America, aren't you?" He spoke in English, apparently for Nick's benefit.

"That's right. It's a pleasure to meet you. I'm looking forward to seeing you fight the bulls on Sunday."

"I look forward to it myself. Nothing excites me like the Fiesta. Though I live here much of the year, it is always like a strange new place to me for this week in July."

Another couple joined them for dinner—a young Englishwoman named Lynn Watermark, who was a writer for a weekly political journal back in London, and her husband Philip, publisher of a small daily newspaper in the Cambridge area. "We're very political in our neck of the woods," Philip Watermark told them over dessert. "Those University people have a broad view of world affairs—and these days, with the news full of arms deals and intrigues, the press has to strive to keep up. Lynn is doing a series on international terrorism she hopes to expand into a book later."

Maria turned her dark eyes toward the young Englishwoman. "I've always wanted to write something, to see my name in print. Is it a thrill for you?"

"Rather," Lynn Watermark replied. "But now I'm more interested in getting my words and ideas before the public. There's so much to say about international affairs these days, so much happening."

"Are you gathering material here in Pamplona?" Dominique asked her.

"No," she laughed. "This is simply a pleasure trip for my husband and me, though I'll be continuing on to North Africa after the Fiesta."

"You must find yourself in some dangerous places," Nick said.

"I was in Libya a week before the Americans bombed it. A journalist must go where the story is."

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After dinner, Nick prevailed on Carlos to show them his wardrobe of bullfighting costumes. The matador good-naturedly led the party upstairs to a walk-in closet off the master bedroom. The outfits were various colors, but mainly shades of pale-blue heavily embroidered with gold thread. "The pants must be skin-tight, of course," he explained, "so the horn of a charging bull cannot catch at a wrinkle of cloth."

"Where are your capes?" Nick asked casually.

"I have only one. It is my lucky cape. I will not fight without it."

"He used it in his first match as a professional matador," Maria explained.

Carlos removed it carefully from a shelf in the closet and held it up for them to examine. "I have bled on this cape, and so have a number of bulls. But it has worn well through the years."

He replaced the cape, relocked the closet, and led them back downstairs for after-dinner brandy. When Nick departed with Dominique, it was after midnight. Maria walked them to the door. She had spoken little to Nick during the evening but he'd noticed her once in deep conversation with Dominique.

"Let's have lunch tomorrow or Saturday," she suggested to her now.

"I'd like that," Dominique said. "I'll phone you."

Nick offered the British couple a ride to the hotel, but they had brought their own car. The couples parted at the red door and Nick lingered only long enough to observe that the burglar alarm was a highly professional device, not one to be bypassed with ease.

On the drive back, Dominique said, "Maria is very concerned about Carlos. She says he seems nervous about Sunday's bullfight, which isn't like him at all."

"Has he been fighting regularly?"

"Virtually every Sunday, according to Maria. She thinks he's nervous about appearing here in Pamplona."

"He seemed in good spirits tonight. Do you still want me to steal his cape?"

"Yes."

"He probably won't fight at all without the cape."

"That's the idea," she reminded him. "I thought of it back in Paris when Maria told me of his strange behavior last week. If his cape is stolen, it will give him a legitimate excuse to stay out of the bullring on Sunday."

"And it's worth my fee of twenty-five-thousand dollars?"

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She shrugged. "He's my brother."

Nick decided to steal the cape on Friday night, so Dominique arranged to have lunch with Maria on Saturday, to learn Carlos' reaction to the theft. She and Nick spent Friday roaming the crowded streets, stopping for an afternoon drink in a cafe that claimed to have been in business there since Hemingway's time.

"Do you think you can do it?" Dominique asked.

"It's my business."

"I don't want him hurt," she cautioned.

"I rarely hurt anyone," he assured her.

Later, on the way back to their hotel, they caught a glimpse of Lynn and Philip Watermark climbing into a taxi. Lynn saw them and waved.

Nick knew that Carlos and Maria went to bed late, so it was after one in the morning before he left the hotel through the side entrance to the parking lot, dressed in black. He left the car a good distance from the San Juan home and went the rest of the way on foot. When he reached the red door, he took an aerosol canister from his pocket and attached a slim metal tube to its nozzle. By standing on tiptoe and holding the can high above his head, he was able to maneuver the other end of the tube through the louvered opening of the alarm box. Then he pressed the aerosol button, forcing a mixture of Freon and polyurethane up the tube and into the box. Within several seconds, the mixture would harden into a solid plastic, permanently disabling the alarm bell.

Nick gave it a minute to be sure, then set to work on the door. When it sprang open, there was no sound from the alarm. He crouched in the doorway a moment, listening for any other alarm bells in the house. All was quiet.

The door beyond the courtyard opened easily and Nick silently climbed the stairs to the second floor. He heard light snoring as he entered the master bedroom and made for the closet. The lock yielded at once without disturbing the rhythm of the snores. He took the cape and carefully relocked the door. Three minutes later, he was back outside, with only the ruined alarm box offering any evidence of a burglary. With a bit of luck, Carlos might not discover the missing cape until Sunday morning.

Nick drove around for a half hour, making certain he wasn't followed, before returning to the hotel. He placed the cape in an opaque plastic bag before leaving the car and took it upstairs to show Dom-

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inique in the morning. Instead he found her in the hall outside his door, apparently trying to rouse him.

When she saw him, she turned on him in a fury. The blood was drained from her face. "What have you done? What in hell have you done?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"The police just phoned me. They found a body in the street. They think it's Carlos."

Nick went with her to the Pamplona police station, telling her he'd done nothing to harm her brother. "I think there's some mistake," he tried to reassure her. "Thirty minutes ago he was in his own bed, fast asleep." He wasn't really as certain as he sounded. The snorer might have been Maria, or someone else for that matter. Still, his words seemed to calm Dominique for the moment.

"It can't be Carlos," she kept saying as they drove. The fury had gone out of her voice.

"Why did the police call you rather than Maria?"

"They said no one answered at the house. But Carlos sometimes unplugs the telephone so he won't be disturbed. I told them that, and they were going to send a car around. All I could think of was that he'd caught you breaking in, tried to stop your escape, and you killed him. God, I was blaming myself for all of it!"

"Here we are," Nick said. "And there's Carlos!"

It was indeed. The tall matador stood with his wife on the steps of the police station, conversing with a uniformed officer. When he saw Nick and his sister emerge from the car, he waved. "There's been some terrible mixup," he told Dominique. "This officer just came and got us out of bed."

"Thank God you're alive!"

"I'm saving myself for the bulls," Carlos said with a smile. "Let's go in and see what's happening."

A detective named Rafael was full of apologies. "One of my men thought the body looked like you, Senor. When no one answered at your house, we called your sister at the hotel."

"You keep close tabs on me," Carlos said.

"During Fiesta week we keep close tabs on everyone. It is well known that your sister is visiting from Paris."

They agreed to take a look at the body of the man who so closely resembled Carlos and Detective Rafael led them through a covered passage to the building next door, which seemed to serve as a tem-

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porary morgue. "It is the running of the bulls," Rafael explained. "A death is rare, but we must be prepared for anything. This man was found near the beginning of the route. His throat has been cut."

The man beneath the sheet did resemble Carlos in a general way. Their height, build, and coloring were about the same, and the dead man appeared to be about Carlos' age. Neither Carlos nor Maria had ever seen the man before. "He doesn't look that much like you," she insisted. "You're better-looking."

"There was no identification," the detective told them. "Only a used bus ticket from Madrid and a small amount of cash. If he had a wallet, it was stolen."

"You say he was found on the street?" Nick asked.

"In some bushes by the side of the road, near where the bulls are released for the running each morning."

"He's probably some tourist up for the Fiesta," Maria said. "If that police officer had come to the door a few hours earlier, he'd have frightened me to death."

As they left the police station, Nick was silently thankful for this unexpected diversion. If the robbery was discovered by chance in the morning, Carlos would assume it happened while they were at the police station, supplying Nick with a perfect alibi.

"Stop back at the house for a drink," Carlos suggested to his sister and Nick. "It's not every night I'm reported dead."

"I just had a horrible thought," Dominique said. "Is it possible someone thought they were killing you?"

"No, no," Carlos replied, giving her a reassuring hug. "Maria is right. He really didn't look that much like me. The officer who found him must have been a bit bleary-eyed."

Dominique was smiling when they left the San Juan home an hour later, driving back through the nearly empty streets to the hotel. "It's as if a weight has been lifted from my shoulders," she told Nick. "I was foolish to have hired you, Nick. Carlos and Maria seemed fine tonight. You won't need to steal the cape, after all."

"I already have it," Nick told her. "I was returning with it when you told me about the body the police found."

"Where is it?"

"I hid it in my room before we went to the police station."

She thought about it. "All right. Let's hear what Maria says when I have lunch with her tomorrow."

Nick slept late and missed the running of the bulls on Saturday

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morning. When he rang Dominique's room shortly before noon she was about to depart for her luncheon with Maria. She promised to phone him when she returned.

He ate a late brunch downstairs and when he returned to his room the telephone was ringing. But the woman at the other end wasn't Dominique, it was the British journalist, Lynn Watermark. "Do you remember me?" she asked. "We met the other night at the San Juans'."

"Of course I remember you. How are you enjoying your visit?"

"Fine. I've come across some interesting things I'd like to discuss with you. Would you be free this afternoon for coffee or a drink?"

Nick agreed, more curious than anything else. He checked the hiding place of the stolen cape, carefully inserted beneath the mattress pad on the room's unused twin bed, and went downstairs to meet her.

Lynn Watermark's face seemed softer and prettier by daylight. She was dressed in colorfully casual clothes that seemed proper for the Fiesta. Once their drinks had been served, however, she got down to business, slipping a notebook and pen from her big purse. "I didn't plan on an interview," Nick said with a grin.

"It's not an interview. I just want to discuss something for my book."

"I thought you said this was a pleasure trip."

"That was before last night. A man was killed here in Pamplona last night."

"So I've heard."

"I understand you viewed the body, along with Carlos and Maria."

"Your sources are very good."

She shrugged. "This detective, Rafael—he's honored that a British writer has taken an interest in the case. The dead man looks something like Carlos."

"A bit. The officer who found the body thought it was Carlos at first."

"Precisely. Did you see the body after they undressed it?"

"No."

"It had several scars of the sort inflicted by bulls' horns—old scars and new. Rafael is quite familiar with that sort of injury."

"Recent scars?"

"Some fairly recent, some old."

"What are you trying to say?"

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"They were scars such as a matador would have. It's possible someone wanted Carlos to appear dead."

"For what purpose?" Nick asked.

"I don't know. I thought you might have an idea."

"I'm only a visitor."

She allowed herself a slight smile. "In Pamplona at Fiesta time, people aren't always what they seem. The name of Nick Velvet is known to the police of several countries."

"I'm here as a tourist. Do you think I'd use my own name if I had any other motive?" There was no point in denying his identity, but he couldn't help wondering how long she'd known about him. At dinner on Thursday night she'd betrayed no sign of recognizing his name when they were introduced. "What brings you and your husband to Pamplona?" he countered.

"Did you ever hear of the Sunday Bomber, Mr. Velvet?"

"Vaguely. Some tabloid sensation, isn't it?"

"The Sunday Bomber is a name given to a particularly vicious terrorist who operates throughout Europe and the Middle East, usually striking at some public event on a Sunday."

"Like a bullfight?"

"Until now he—or she—has stayed away from Spain, and thank heaven for that. They have enough trouble here these days with the Basque separatists."

"There's no description of this person?"

"Only one. He was seen just before a bomb destroyed a tourist bus in Athens a month ago. If the description is to be believed, he looks somewhat like the man who was found murdered here last night."

"Then your hunt is over—if you were hunting him."

"I wasn't planning to capture him, only interview him."

"Well, you may be too late for that," he agreed. "Just what was it you wanted from me?"

"Does your being here have anything to do with terrorists, Mr. Velvet?"

"Not a thing," he answered honestly. "It has to do with bullfighting."

"Will you be there tomorrow to see Carlos fight?"

"I'll be there."

Nick watched the running of the bulls on Sunday morning from the safety of a heavy wooden barricade along the side of the street. Dominique joined him after the bulls had passed. She had told him

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after her lunch with Maria on Saturday that Carlos had not yet discovered his cape missing. Now she led him away from the crowd and said, "I'm worried about this afternoon. I wanted the cape stolen because Maria said my brother seemed to be frightened of fighting the bulls here at home. I thought that if his lucky cape was stolen he'd have a legitimate excuse not to fight without admitting cowardice. The masculine image is very important to Spanish men, you know."

"You'd understand this, being Spanish, too."

"Our mother was French, and when the marriage ended I went with her to Paris. Carlos stayed with our father. We haven't been close in recent years, but he is still my brother. Maria looks to me for help. But now—"

"Now you fear you might have helped too much."

"This talk of terrorists, the dead man yesterday morning—"

"The man who resembled your brother."

"Yes. Suppose Carlos has been frightened not of fighting the bull this afternoon but of a possible attempt on his life? If someone meant to kill my brother and cut the throat of a stranger by mistake, he might try again."

Nick pondered this for a moment. "I still have the cape. What do you want done with it?"

"I'll pay you for it, of course. Whether or not I return it to Carlos will be my decision."

"Whether his enemy is a murderer or a bull, he'd be safer at home this afternoon."

"I know that. Where is the cape?"

"In my room. What time does the bullfight begin?"

"Four o'clock, and they always start on time."

Dominique took the cape and promised to see Nick at the bullring. When he arrived, he had no idea whether Carlos San Juan would be fighting. He had received his full payment for stealing the cape and there was no real reason for him to stay on in Pamplona except that he was curious. An unknown man had died, and Carlos appeared to be afraid. Maria had been afraid, too, he remembered. What was it she'd said—?

Exactly at four o'clock, the music blared through the stands as the three matadors on the afternoon card entered with their assistants, the dart-wielding banderilleros, the mounted picadores, the sword-handlers, and those who would clean and clear the arena afterward.

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Nick recognized Carlos with the other two matadors, leading the march to the traditional music of the *paso doble*. The matadors' red capes seemed to shimmer in the afternoon sun as they saluted the judge and greeted the cheering crowd.

Nick scanned the seats of the circular stadium for some sign of Dominique or Maria, but he could see neither one. Perhaps the matadors' families watched from a special location. The program showed that each of the three matadors, beginning with Carlos, would kill two bulls that afternoon. The judge waved a white scarf and there was a sudden fanfare from the trumpeter and drummer. The released bull charged fiercely into the ring, where Carlos' assistants played it with capes while he judged its fighting characteristics. Then Carlos himself made a series of passes with his cape, and the mounted picadores moved in to vex and weaken the animal with their lances.

By the time the banderilleros had wounded the bull further with their ribbon-decorated darts, Nick decided he had no desire to see the brave animal tormented further. He left his seat and as he headed for the back of the stadium, his eyes caught the glint of sunlight on metal. It could have been anything, but some sixth sense told him it was a gun. He hurried up the steps to the top row of the arena, his eyes searching the wildly cheering crowd.

Then he spotted a man and a woman struggling near him on the top row. He recognized Dominique at once, but it wasn't until he reached them that he realized her antagonist was Philip Watermark. They were fighting for possession of a thin-barreled sniper's rifle with a removable stock. When she saw him, Dominique screamed over the roar of the crowd, "Nick, help me! He's trying to kill Carlos!"

Nick wrenched them apart and Watermark turned to run. He must have forgotten that the railing was immediately behind him. There was a final roar from the crowd as Carlos went in over the horns and buried his sword in the neck of the charging bull. At the same instant, the Englishman fell over the railing, hurtling to the pavement far below, his cry lost in the wave of cheers that swept through the stadium.

It was Nick who found the packet of pictures that had dislodged itself from Watermark's pocket when his body hit the ground. He slipped it into his own pocket as Detective Rafael and a uniformed guard hurried up to join the growing circle of curious spectators around the dead man. "What happened?" Rafael asked.

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"It was an accident," Nick told him. "He fell over the railing at the top level."

"You were with him?"

"Yes—so was Dominique Jadis."

"Where is she? Can you find her?"

"I think so."

"Please bring her to me. I'll want to question you both."

Nick found Dominique near the dressing rooms. "I want to see my brother," she said, "to tell him what happened."

"He has another bull to fight later."

"I know, but if he feared assassination I must tell him he is safe now."

Nick took the pictures from his pocket. "Watermark had these on him when he died. They're telescopic photographs of a matador in action at various bullrings."

She looked at them.

"It's not Carlos."

"No, it isn't. Let's go in and see him."

The dressing rooms were not really used for that purpose, since most matadors preferred to go through the elaborate ritual of dressing at home, arriving at the bullring in full costume. They found Carlos seated in a lounge with his wife. Lynn Watermark was there, too, and it was obvious from their faces that they all knew what had happened. Lynn glanced at Nick and Dominique and said quietly, "I have to go now. The police will be looking for me." She walked past Nick without speaking.

Carlos sat white-faced, smoking a thin cigar. Outside, from the direction of the bullring, came the familiar roar and cheers of the crowd.

"She told you about her husband?" Nick asked.

It was Maria who answered. "She told us he was dead."

"He was trying to shoot you, Carlos," Dominique said. "I paid Nick to steal your lucky cape so you wouldn't fight today."

"You—"

"When you borrowed another and went out there anyway I was afraid for you. I saw Philip Watermark arrive, carrying a camera with a case for the tripod, but it looked suspicious and I followed him. He had the parts for a rifle inside the tripod case and he put them together."

The familiar music of the *paso doble* signaled the beginning of the third encounter between man and bull. Carlos glanced at the clock

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on the wall and stubbed out his cigar. "Did Lynn tell you who her husband was?" Nick asked.

"He was a hunter of terrorists," Maria answered, "of men beyond the law."

Carlos rose to his feet and picked up the borrowed cape. "I must go now. One more bull awaits me."

Dominique tried to stop him. "Your lucky cape is in my car. Let me get it for you."

"There is no time now. This one will serve me again."

The roar of the crowd was building as before. "Will you watch him?" Nick asked Maria after he had gone.

"He never likes me to watch him any more."

The three of them sat listening to the crowd until the cheering signaled the death of the third bull. Then Nick spoke again, "Maria, at the police station yesterday morning you remarked that the officer would have frightened you to death if he'd come to your house a few hours earlier with a report of Carlos' death. That implies your husband was away from home earlier that night."

"Yes," she admitted.

He showed her the pictures Watermark had been carrying. "Do you recognize this man?"

"He is not Carlos," she said.

"No, he's the man who died here Friday night, the man the police thought was Carlos at first. The scars on his body showed he was a matador, and one still working at his trade. Carlos was out of the house that night. He could have killed the man and hidden his body along the route of the running of the bulls. If the police hadn't found it, Carlos might have pushed it onto the road in the morning, to be trampled by the animals. Then no one would have noticed the man's resemblance to him."

"That's insane!" Dominique objected. "Why would my brother do such a thing?"

"Because Lynn Watermark had come to Pamplona on the trail of a terrorist called the Sunday Bomber. Her husband was on the same trail. Maria said Carlos was fearful of fighting today. Couldn't it be because he hadn't faced a bull in many months?"

"He fights almost every Sunday," Dominique insisted.

"No, his double fought on Sundays, while Carlos flew around the Middle East and Europe planting bombs."

Outside, the trumpet fanfare announced the release of Carlos' second bull.

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"Maria," Dominique implored, "tell him it can't be true!"

But Maria San Juan said nothing.

"That's why he didn't want Maria to see him fight—because it wasn't him," Nick continued. "This Sunday it had to be him, because too many people in Pamplona know him. When the double arrived—either to blackmail him or simply to watch him fight— he had to be killed before Lynn Watermark found him. But Lynn's husband had pictures, and when he saw Carlos fight he must have detected tiny differences in their style. That was when he brought out his rifle."

"Is it true?" Dominique asked her sister-in-law.

Maria said, "That is the story Lynn told us. She has copies of the pictures to prove it was the double at those other fights."

"What will Carlos do?" Dominique asked. "What can—?"

Then they heard the collective groan from the stands, and some screaming by the women. Maria was on her feet as Nick ran to the door. He could see only one end of the bullring, with running men waving their capes to distract the bull. There was more screaming and crying, and the gates were opened to allow an emergency ambulance into the ring.

Dominique stood up. She was trembling. "Maria," she said, "take my hand."

Nick watched the two women walk out the door together, toward the horror they could not yet see.

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a ***NEW*** short story by

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A clever little song, but its entrance into memory was disturbing. Something wrong with it, something he didn't want to remember, something that made movement imperative. He said aloud, "No use standing here," bought an evening paper, crossed the road, walking in a businesslike manner as if he knew where he was going. He passed a shop that showed in the window brass door-knobs, door knockers, bathroom fittings, gilded mirrors. Stopped to consider his reflection in a mirror.

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HAS ANYBODY HERE SEEN ME?

by JULIAN SYMONS

Out of the Underground train, along the platform, up the stairs, onto the escalator. Advertisements moving past—best pizza in London, it's mouthwateringly M-m-m-moreish, Michael Frayn play at Savoy, see-thru nightie that turns him on, Smirnoff the vodka, Morland's Can Find That Job You're Looking For, Dance All Night at the Fandango, Alligator Jeans Go Snap.

To the top, present ticket, up more stairs, out. Where?

Why, he thought, looking at the bookshop on one corner, Great

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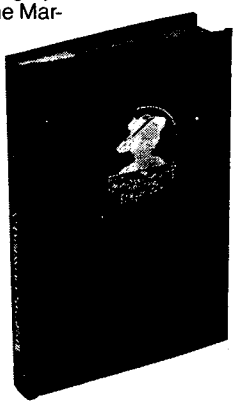

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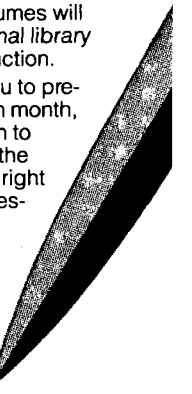

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Newport Street beside it, newsstand nearby, the theater showing *He Did What She Wanted,* a new comedy, I know this place, of course I do. Then, seeing the Underground entrance saying Leicester Square, he shook with laughter. All I had to do was look at the station name as I came out, silly me. Leicester Square station, just round the corner the Hippodrome, then the Square itself. *Used* to be the Hippodrome, now Talk of the Town, something like that. I know where I am, of course I do. Couldn't recognize Leicester Square, did you ever? No I never, no I never did.

So here I am, but the question remains—most unfortunately, the question remains. Not where, but who? Face up to it, the name's gone. Who knows it, who's seen me, am I the invisible man? Familiar lines came into his head, he had to restrain himself from singing them:

"Has anybody here seen me?
M-e-double-e, me,
Where can me be?
I left home at half past ten,
Haven't seen myself since then,
Has anybody here seen m-e-double-e, me, double-e, me?"

A clever little song, but its entrance into memory was disturbing. Something wrong with it, something he didn't want to remember, something that made movement imperative. He said aloud, "No use standing here," bought an evening paper, crossed the road, walking in a businesslike manner as if he knew where he was going. He passed a shop that showed in the window brass doorknobs, door knockers, bathroom fittings, gilded mirrors. Stopped to consider his reflection in a mirror.

A tallish man, thin dark-blue jacket and trousers, mouse-colored hair receding a little, smooth, almost delicate features, good figure, elegant really. Lines about the eyes, though, and, oh dear, as he looked more closely, some wrinkles in the delicate features. Age? Oh, say thirty-five—well, perhaps forty, no more than forty. Why should thought of age make alarm bells ring in his head?

And now that I've seen him: who is this stranger?

But *of course,* he mentally told the figure in the glass, there's really no problem in this case of lost identity. Just—it's so simple—just look at his wallet, credit cards, any stray envelopes bearing name and address that may be about his person. The figure in the glass felt its inner breast pocket. Nothing there. He watched with detachment as the figure, now a little agitated, felt in jacket, trouser,

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hip pockets, dredging up some five pounds in coins, and a shopping list made on a piece of paper evidently torn from a memo pad. Fillet steak, new potatoes, courgettes. Is that my writing? The figure in the glass put the paper against the shop window to write on it, then checked himself. No pen.

Never mind, he told himself, no cause for alarm, I'm not lost, I know just where I am, could find my way without trouble around Central London, no trouble at all, I assure you. All that's happened is a temporary blackout, happens to almost everybody at some time or another. A blockage, like that caused by wax in the ear. In ten minutes or perhaps less, something in my head will go *click* as the ear goes *pop* and I shall remember.

A drink might help.

Within a hundred yards, a pub revealed itself. The sign outside showed two men staring at each other, one a respectable whiskered top-hatted Victorian, the other a jaunty crouching creature, half man and half ape, arms stretching well below his knees. The pub was called The Jekyll and Hyde. He pushed open the saloon-bar door and went in.

"What'll it be?"

"A pint of best bitter."

Did he know this pub, did he often drink bitter? The place was crowded, but he saw a vacant seat at one table, sat down, drank some bitter, gave an involuntary shudder.

The other man at the table was thick-set, sandy, with a sharp inquiring nose. "Great weather we're having. Can't have enough of it far as I'm concerned." The words were said challengingly, in apparent fear of contradiction.

He realized that he was hot, uncomfortably so, shirt clinging to him. He nodded.

"The wife now, she don't like it. Get out in the garden, I say, enjoy the sun while you can, don't get much of it, this ain't California. Know what she says? Too much sun gives you skin cancer. I ask you, how many days do we get like this in a year—ten? twenty? Say thirty, the most I'll give you is thirty." The glare seemed to call for a response, but he did not make it. "All right, thirty. And that gives you skin cancer, I say to her, thirty days in the sun, is that what you're telling me? No good, though—she covers herself up like she was wearing one of those Arab things."

"Yashmaks."

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"Right you are." The man looked at him with respect. "You a regular? Seen you in here before, have I?"

"If you'll excuse me, there's something I want to read in the paper." It was true, he had an overwhelming feeling that the evening paper contained vital information about his identity.

"Suit yourself." The man picked up his empty glass, ordered a refill at the bar, took it to another table.

He opened the paper, an early edition. He could not have said what he expected to find, perhaps a name he would recognize, perhaps a picture of the man in the shop mirror. He turned the pages quickly, not reading, but looking for a name, a picture, something he felt must be there.

Nothing. Now he went through the pages more slowly, lingering over the news stories. On the front page discussions about an atomic pact, and in a separate panel "This Time the Wolf Kills." The Wolf, it seemed, was a burglar and rapist who had terrorized an area in South London. He was uncannily skillful in entering houses through skylights, windows closed but not locked, basement areas. He cased houses carefully, making sure that only one person was there, and that a woman. Mostly they were married, and the Wolf struck in the late morning or early afternoon. He threatened the woman with a knife, raped her, then took any jewelry he could find. In this case, the woman had resisted, there had been a struggle, and the Wolf had stabbed her to death. Significant clues, the story said, were being followed up by police.

What else? Scandal in a Home for Young Delinquents, Big Drugs Haul at Heathrow, Pop Star Tells All, Arson Suspected in City Fire, Man in Spy Enquiry Vanishes. "Civil Servant James Hetherington, recently interrogated in relation to the missing Ministry of Defense papers, left his home in Clapham yesterday morning and has apparently disappeared. His wife Jennifer said he left just as usual after breakfast, taking his briefcase and saying he might be a little late that evening . . . "

"Is this seat taken?"

A woman stood beside his table, glass in hand, half smiling. He said it was free, and she sat down. A young woman, thirty-five perhaps, unobtrusively dressed, gold ring on wedding finger. Was there something about her he recognized? Now she did laugh, raised her glass. "Seen enough?"

"I beg your pardon. It's just that I thought—"

"Yes?"

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"Do we know each other?"

She looked at him over the rim of the glass, a short drink, probably gin and something. "Well. What do you think?"

"I think perhaps we've met before."

"Tell me the old old story. I mean, I wouldn't call that a new approach, would you?" Her voice was artificially refined.

"It isn't an approach. It's simply that I can't remember—"

"Where it was we met? That one's as old as the hills, too. Never mind, I'm Rosemary. What's your name?"

"John."

She had noticed the pause before he said it. "That's not very original, either. Are you going to buy me one, John? Gin and french."

As he went up to the bar and ordered the drink he wondered: Do we really know each other or not? Can I tell her the truth? The barman seemed to look at him oddly. Perhaps they knew each other, too, he was expecting to be greeted.

"Do we know each other?"

The barman had a toothbrush moustache, hair cut very short. "How's that?"

"I've been in this pub before, thought I recognized you."

"You looking for trouble?"

"Of course not. Why should you think so?"

"You stay your side of the counter, I'll stay on mine, right?" The barman stuck his face forward, pores were visible in his broad cheeks. "Or put it this way, I don't know you, you don't know me, let's keep it that way, right?"

Rosemary was reading his paper. "I hope you don't mind."

"Of course not."

"You've spilt something, John—stepped in it, too, from the look of it. Cheers." He looked down and saw two dark patches on his left trouser leg, one near the bottom, the other above the knee. Another patch, or stain, marked his left shoe.

"This Wolf, I don't know what things are coming to, you're not safe in your own home. What you been up to then, John?"

Confession seemed inevitable. "I don't know."

"How do you mean, don't know?"

"This is important." He leaned across the table, grasped for her hand, but she withdrew it. "Do we know each other or not?"

She looked away. "That's a funny question. It was you said we knew each other."

"Please listen. I said my name was John, but I don't know if it is

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or not, I don't know what it is, I've lost my memory. I think I only lost it a little while ago." He was conscious that the words must sound absurd, as he saw her looking from side to side as if in fear of attack. The overlay of refinement had gone from her voice when she spoke again.

"I'll tell you what I think, John, you're a bloody nutter. I'm a working girl, I thought you meant business, it wasn't me who started this what's-your-name lark. I don't know what you're after, but whatever the game is I'm not playing. I'm going out of that door now and if you come after me I swear I'll turn you in. Now you remember that, *John.*"

She left the pub, hips swaying. As the door closed after her, the barman stopped polishing a glass and stared at him as it seemed accusingly. He shook his head as if the action might help to shake those lost bits of memory back into place. Instead, it brought to the surface another line or two of that song:

"I'm an actress on the stage
And I should be all the rage
But I'm always losing *some*thing."

How did it go on? Da da *da,* da da *da,* then the last line of the verse, "And now I've lost meself." Very careless, John or whatever your name is, you'd better find yourself again.

He looked at the pub clock. Two-fifteen. As good a time as any other for discovering your identity. He folded the paper carefully, put it on the table, got up, left the pub.

A fine afternoon in London. Two-fifteen, by now two-sixteen. *I left home at half past ten, Haven't seen myself since then.* Did I buy the fillet steak, if so where is it? Let's hope I didn't leave it out so the cat could get at it. Do you own a cat then, John? Don't know.

Take the first right, second left, leads down to the river. Is that so, how do I know it? But I do. Down to the river, onto the bridge, vault the parapet—no problem, it's quite low—then down, down, an endless descent that lasts only seconds. The water cold, dirty. Make no resistance. Finish.

That's what you may *think*, John, but things aren't that simple. Always a dozen busybodies around just waiting for people to jump off bridges, raise the alarm, strip off, jump in, life savers to a man or woman. Man or woman created he them. But did he, is that so?

For that matter, they say the moment you hit the water you struggle, don't want it, never meant things to end like this, swim with a nice easy crawl to safety. Never meant to enter that cold

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river, officer, just leaning over the parapet to look at my reflection, Narcissus complex you might say, leaned that tiny bit too far.

Stop it, stop it, he said to himself—or had the words been spoken aloud? He took the first right. A narrow street this, small shops, shabby, seems familiar. News agent's, antique shop Victoria Regina, "We sell all the rubbish Grandma threw out," barber's pole, heads bent over basins, attendant waves and smiles. At me? Go in, ask, Excuse me, who am I? Have you seen me? Has anybody here seen me? Drawn a blank, oh, dear, thank you kindly, sorry you've been troubled. But where can me be?

A couple of lines of patter: *I'm so forgetful, you know, last night I got home, took me clothes off and tucked 'em in bed, then hung meself up in the wardrobe.* But let's be frank about it, this is no joke. *Has* anybody here seen me? Waiting, waiting for the click of recognition.

It did not come. He took the second left, and at once felt uneasily: I know this. On the left there will be an Italian restaurant named Ruggiere, a cut-price men's clothing shop, a block of flats named Atlas Court. And on the right? The right was boarded up. There were cracks in the posters and he crossed the road, looked through. A half demolished building stood there, a sign in front of it: *For All Demolition Work Come To D. E. Stroyer.* On the damaged facade of the building the word *Theatre* remained, and on the walls below two or three torn placards. One showed the picture of a top-hatted, monocled Victorian toff and said, *Burlington Bertie Is One of the Boys,* another was of a woman wearing an enormous picture hat, with *Outrageous Olivia, Outré with Oomph* beneath.

"Good afternoon to you."

He turned. A tramp, perhaps, but if so a burly and upright one. Clothes old and shabby, trousers with old-fashioned turn-ups and slightly frayed at the bottom, but grey hair neatly brushed, and a waxed grey moustache giving an air somewhat military yet hardly genuine. The voice, too, had something assumed about it, rather as though it issued from a ventriloquist.

"Lookin' at the old place, then? Victim of the property developers, a damned shame. And what do they do with it? Two years now, and it still isn't even properly knocked down. Just sittin' on it, every month it's worth another few thou. A damned shame, I say."

"Perhaps you can remind me, what was it called?"

The man stared. "Remind you? Ay should say so. Remind you of the Old Tyme Theatre, that's extremely droll."

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He gestured at what lay behind the boarding. "I've forgotten exactly your connection, I'm afraid."

The man pulled at his moustache, faintly clicked his heels. His voice took on momentarily the stentorian tones of a circus barker. "Percy Cudmore at your service, formerly sarn't major in Her Majesty's Indian Army, now employed to keep this rabble in order. Remember now, old man? Kind of combined commissionaire and chucker-out line, though some of the lads got a bit above themselves at times. *You* remember that, or should do." His left eye closed in an unmistakable wink.

"I'm afraid not."

"If you say so. No offense meant—none taken, I hope." He stood a little closer, garlic and beer discernible. "Times are diff for an exsarn't major, old man. Can't even get a job as a pub bouncer, say I'm too old and not up to it, can you believe it? The same not true of your good self, I hope—you're lookin' remarkably well an' flourishin'. Wish I could say similar. If you happen to have a bit of foldin' money superfluous to present needs it'd be much appreciated."

Here was somebody who knew him. What could be simpler than to say: I remember we were both associated with this theatre, but exactly what did I do there, who was I? But the words were literally unspeakable. He had a feeling of dread, his limbs trembled, his throat seemed choked so that he could hardly breathe. He opened his jacket, felt for the wallet that was not there, then buttoned it again hurriedly, aghast at what the opened jacket had shown. But Percy Cudmore seemed to have noticed nothing.

He felt in his pocket, found two of the golden coins, put them in the hand that almost surreptitiously received them, then took a step backward to remove himself from the body so close to his own. Hand closed on coins, transferred them swiftly to pocket, encounter over. Hand sketched a near-salute, jeering rather than respectful, and the words, too, seemed jeering, though they were harmless enough.

"Left the old foldin' money at home, worried about gettin' mugged I daresay, very wise. Many thanks, old man. Do the same for you one day, I hope." Now Percy Cudmore, done with him, walked up the road, fifty yards away turned into a pub.

Hand shaking, he unbuttoned the jacket again. The right side of his shirt was spotted and smeared with red and there were stains on the jacket lining. He buttoned it once more.

Now his actions became decisive. He walked down to the end of the road, crossed it. The river was there, as he had known it would

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be. He walked along beside it until he came to the bridge, but hardly glanced at the water. Left at the bridge, over the Thames. Now on the south side, he went through a minor maze of narrow streets without troubling to look at their names, steps unerring.

All this was a kind of sleepwalking. He had no idea of who he was or what would be at the end of this apparently purposeful left-right, left-right. He no longer sought to find a name for himself. I am me, he thought, no need to look further. Has anybody here seen me? Never mind whether they have or not, whether I left home at half past ten or not. If I did hang myself up in a wardrobe and put my clothes to bed, it's nobody's business but mine. The only person concerned is m-e-double-e, me, double-e, me.

Steady now, only a song. Don't take it seriously. Petrol station on corner. Turn right.

But honestly, admit it. I'm always losing something, and now I've lost meself.

Do I wish to find me, him, or it?

He turned another corner, stopped still. This was a mews, the street cobbled, garages on either side, little houses above them. The houses had been tarted up, newly painted blue, pink, white. Pot plants outside the front doors. At the far end a knot of people, two or three police cars. He made his way toward them over the cobbles, treading delicately as a cat. Faces turned toward him expectantly. He smiled, nodded. Yes, I know you. It is me, not you, that has disappeared.

A copper in uniform at the door looked inquiring, but feet clattered on the stairs, a man appeared. "Chief Inspector Hawkins, just the man we're looking for, come on up." He followed the Chief Inspector up the stairs into the living room, then put hand to mouth in dismay.

It was, or had been, a pretty room. The Italian china ornaments on walls and tables in the shapes of gloves, shoes, opened books, were a little chichi, the *trompe l'oeil* window opening on a country scene with real curtains over it was rather preposterous, the tubular chairs and tables were out of key with the ornaments and the window, but still it had been a pretty room. Now most of the ornaments were smashed, the curtain had been pulled down, lighting fittings were broken. Glass and china littered the floor.

"Somebody went a bit berserk, wouldn't you say?" Hawkins was rosy-faced, smiling, his manner jolly. "But you ain't seen nothing yet." He led the way along past a tidy kitchen to a bedroom. There was blood everywhere here. It had spurted over the walls, marked

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the white carpet, there were splotches of it on the pink sheets. He shook his head, he could not have said why.

"Looking for the body? Went half an hour ago, no need to worry. Now then, sir. Your name is Oliver Raynes and you share this delightful residence with one Archibald Burton, now the late Archibald Burton, agreed? And the said Archie had recently been showing an undue interest in a young actor by the name of Leon Padici, agreed? And according to your next-door neighbor, Archie had been communicating to you the idea that he'd prefer your room to your company, as the old saying goes—he'd like you to move out and Leon to move in.

"And this same neighbor heard a most tremendous barney going on early this morning—couldn't help hearing, he says, the shouts and shrieks woke him up—as a conclusion to which Archie succumbed to attacks with a meat chopper from the kitchen, the assailant being apparently under the impression that Archie was a side of beef that needed carving. He then did the demolition job you've seen in the next room and exited into the street, where the ever-watchful neighbor saw him. Or you."

The words made no impact on him. He was staring at a poster on the wall which had escaped the general carnage, except for a spot or two of blood. It was one he had seen outside the theater, showing the woman in the picture hat. It was signed *Dearest Archie, with all my love, Olivia.* The Chief Inspector was still talking.

"Now here you are, come back to save us the trouble of looking for you, which I must say is very helpful. And with marks that show just what a naughty boy you've been." He wagged his round, rosy head in reproof. "I couldn't be sorrier, I'm one of your admirers."

"Not me," he said. "It wasn't me. I could never have done such a thing. This isn't me." He took off his jacket, threw it on the ground, unzipped his trousers. "Please. These are not mine. The clothes I wear are not me, nothing of all this is me. I am not me. Has anybody here seen me?"

He looked wildly round, but the Chief Inspector was his only audience. His trousers dropped to the floor. Beneath them he wore frilly pants, lettered *Naughty But Nice.*

Hawkins laughed heartily. "Your famous song, of course. *I left home at half past ten, Haven't seen meself since then.* And very well you always delivered it. Pity the Old Tyme packed up. I used to enjoy those shows, took my old lady, we sang the choruses. Quite fancied you myself, as a matter of fact."

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He laughed again, to show that this was a joke. "And 'I am not me'—that sounds a promising line. It wasn't me hacked my friend to death, it was somebody else, please judge I wasn't there. Yes, very comical, I like it." He restrained his amusement, as it seemed, with difficulty. "But now, Oliver Raynes, I must ask you to put these clothes on again. I am arresting you on the charge of murdering Archibald Burton and must warn you that anything you say may be used in evidence. So come along, Oliver. Or should I say Olivia?"

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a *NEW* Maynard Bullock story by

JAMES POWELL

A couple of times during "The Tulip Gavotte," Bullock had zigged when he should have zagged. When Bullock saw Inspector LaPierre heading in his general direction with a burr under his saddle, he thought it best to make himself scarce. LaPierre, his immediate superior, always occupied the little prompter's box amid the footlights for these productions. But he'd been taking a big interest in tulip choreography ever since Bullock signed on.

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THE TULIP JUGGERNAUT

by JAMES POWELL

Acting Sergeant Maynard Bullock of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police did not consider himself a prude. Still, it bothered him, this talk about a Mountie in the woodpile every time the new Prime Minister's name came up. He shook his head at the laughter of the passengers leaving the headquarters elevator on the first floor. Then the doors slid shut again and all alone he continued his descent into the basement.

Oh, he had to admit the PM possessed a jaw any man on the Force would sell his soul for. Nowadays, no one so well endowed in that department could make it through high school without a visit from a recruiter waving a jaw scholarship to the Mountie Academy. But there were other things about the man that Bullock admired—for

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example, his fine relationship with the American President and what were called their Shamrock Summits because both were Irish. Like all thinking Canadians, Bullock looked on the U.S. as the younger brother who's left his small-town home to become very rich in some shady business or other in the big city. Oh, sure, when he comes back on visits, he likes to put on the dog with his new Packard and flashy tie clip, but Canada, the older stay-at-home brother, knows that beneath all the guff and bluff the kid's still a decent sort who can be made to see that a nuclear holocaust'll be bad news all around, or that as long as water runs downhill acid rain up in Canada hurts everybody.

Bullock stepped from the elevator and followed the basement hallway past the fire-engine-red door of the Command Bunker, past Disguise Fitting and Storage, where he waved at old Corporal Rossi behind the sewing machine, and past the Equipment Dispensing Window. At last he reached the door of the Meditation Room, that quiet corner serving those of the Force who sometimes felt a need to tap back into the old days before ballpoint pens and air-conditioned stakeout vans. The small room was equipped with back projectors that threw images of a northern forest on the walls and scattered a northern sky across the ceiling. A dial in the hall let you pick the season and time of day of your choice.

Blast, thought Bullock when he saw the red light over the door indicating the room was in use. But the dial was set at what he would have chosen himself, a night in late October. Pleased, he selected a long buffalo robe coat and a fur hat with earflaps from the pegs beside the door and stepped inside. Shivering from the sudden cold, he stood by the door and ran a knuckle through his crisping moustache as he waited for his eyes to get used to the moonlight dim.

An owl hooted from a hollow tree. Later on the tape, a loon would give its crazy laughter from the lake beyond the trees. Then the lighting would simulate the moon sliding behind a cloud. A few seconds later, a hilltop wolf would wail like a patrol car. Next would come a light footstep on fallen leaves, marking the stealthy approach of Valcartier, the notorious bandit of northern campfires. A Mountie had only three seconds to rouse himself from meditation, make his hand into a revolver, and spin to face the dark northeast corner. If he failed to mouth off his shot before a slap-bell sounded on the tape, he was honor-bound to put himself on target-practice report.

Bullock could make out a shape clad in furs hunkered down at

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the logs of the electric campfire. A lean, craggy head with an amazing spread of wrinkles at the corners of the eyes peered up at him out of the artificial glow. "Oh, it's you, Bullock," said old Inspector Archie Duff. "Take a pew, why don't you?" Duff headed up the unit responsible for protecting the life of the Prime Minister. It was his quiet boast that he'd never lost a one.

Bullock squatted down. "I thought you'd be with You-Know-Who at Kingsmere, Inspector," he said a bit stiffly. In the secret parlance of the Force, You-Know-Who meant the Prime Minister.

"He had to pop back to town for a bit," said Duff, watching Bullock pour himself a coffee. "How come you're here so late? Inspector LaPierre keeping you after school again?"

Bullock explained how he'd answered the call for extras for *The Tulip Juggernaut*, the Victor Kornflower operetta which was this year's joint effort by The Stout-Hearted Men, the Force's male glee club, and its female equivalent, The Girls They Left Behind Them. "I'm a Patio Pink," said Bullock, as though being that particular kind of tulip was something special. Actually, he'd have preferred being a Red Emperor or a King of the Mustard Patch. "They called a snap dress rehearsal for tonight," he said, reaching down into a pocket of the buffalo robe coat and—yes, he'd chosen the right one from the rack—coming up with a handful of sugar cubes. He doled six of them into his cup and stared into the electric fire.

"Hey, Bullock, look, I'm sorry if I snapped your head off our last time down here," said Duff. "I guess the job was getting to me."

Two months ago, a haggard and jumpy Duff had filled Bullock in on the Sons of Bernardo O'Higgins, a band of Latin American terrorists of Irish extraction pledged to sacrifice their own lives to assassinate heads of state of Irish blood. They held that those who came from exploited and oppressed stock were doubly guilty for crimes committed in that regard. Just a month before, they'd assassinated Sir Darcy (Sluggo) Hannigan, the two-fisted Australian Prime Minister, during a publicity sparring session with a boxing kangaroo dressed in a T-shirt that read *Trade Deficit*. The pouch of the kangaroo suit was stuffed with dynamite, the terrorists' weapon of choice. Their man inside the suit, a sucker for a one-two combination, had the detonator clenched between his teeth.

Now Interpol had informed Duff that a Son of Bernardo O'Higgins intended to assassinate the Prime Minister. "But good godfrey, Inspector," Bullock had said, hoping to buck the guy up, "one Mountie's always been a match for one assassin, suicidal or no." Duff had

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turned purple and called him some very unpleasant things. "Lunkhead" came to mind now. But Bullock didn't believe Mounties should hold grudges. "No harm done, Inspector," he said. As he did, the loon laughed from the lake, the moon slid behind a cloud, and then the hilltop wolf wailed like a patrol car. Would Duff remember the telltale footstep on the leaves? He did. They spun as one to point an index finger at the darkness of the northeast corner.

"Dah! Dah!" shouted Duff.

"Dah!" shouted Bullock, pleased that his phantom marksmanship always killed Valcartier with one shot. But suddenly the dark corner was filled with flashlights and many armed men. Bullock froze, transfixed by the gun barrels. He wanted to shout, "Don't 'Dah!' It's me! It's Bullock!" But he couldn't find his voice.

Someone from the darkness recognized Duff.

"Sorry to break into your meditation time, Inspector," he said, "but the Commissioner invited You-Know-Who and friend over for a before-the-theater Irish stew in the Superintendents-and-Over Dining Room." (During the excavations for this new building, the workers had broken into the warren of tunnels Canada's Prime Ministers use to move unseen beneath Ottawa as they keep their finger on the faint pulse of the bureaucracy. It now provided them secret access to Mountie headquarters.)

Suddenly, six stern-looking raincoats with ouzis pushed their way into the room, followed by the Prime Minister, wonderful chin and all, an older man with reddish hair and a famous smile, and two more plain-clothed Mounties with umbrellas to protect their charges where the tunnel leaked as it passed under the Rideau Canal. Duff and Bullock came to the salute as the swift cortege passed out into the hall with six more raincoats armed with ouzis bringing up the rear.

"Inspector," whispered Bullock, "was You-Know-Who's friend you-know-who?"

Duff smiled. "Fact is, those two guys really enjoy each other's company. The PM's always popping down to Camp David incognito or the President's slipping up here on the sly. It must be great to be Irish, Bullock. But, hey, with this Sons of Bernardo O'Higgins business, I encourage it. I mean they can't be safer than now, right, surrounded by the Secret Service people and the whole Mountie-headquarters detachment, right?"

"You mean tonight's a Command Performance?" demanded Bullock.

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"Mum's the word until the curtain goes up, okay?" said Duff. "What a certain suicidal assassin doesn't know can't hurt us, right?"

The tulip extras were standing backstage all costumed up in green outfits with high headpieces like guardsman bearskins in red or mustard or bright pink when somebody asked, "Anybody know what this damn dress-rehearsal business is all about?"

Feeling that cat-that-swallowed-the-canary grin starting to spread, Bullock thought it best to drift over to the full-length mirror and pretend to admire himself. Oh, he could be Mr. Poker-Face with criminals out in the field, but somehow he always dropped his guard in the company of other Mounties. And, of course, they were superbly trained to pick up on things like a man trying to keep a secret. They knew all the scientific ways to worm it out.

First the cry would go up, "Hey, guys, Maynard's got a secret!" He'd flatly deny that he did. Then someone else would say, "Like hell he does. Who'd tell Maynard a secret?" Of course, he'd have to hint that maybe he did and maybe he didn't. The next thing he knew they'd have sworn him to Mountie rules, meaning he'd have to tell if their guesses were warm or cold. Then the chase would be on. And when it was over, everyone would know that when the curtain rose the President of the United States and the Prime Minister would be sitting with the Commissioner in his box.

Bullock glanced from the mirror toward the wings, where the lead, Staff Sergeant Nelson Edwards, blast him, was primping as he waited for the overture. Bullock shook his head regretfully. This stint as a tulip had ignited a theatrical strain in his blood. He found himself singing Edwards' numbers in the shower (and singing them rather well, if he did say so himself). When suddenly two days ago Edwards' understudy came down with the mumps, it seemed to Bullock that only one man stood between him and stardom. Not that he wished Edwards any more harm than, say, a couple of hours stuck between floors in an elevator—just enough time for Bullock to walk out on stage an unknown and come back a star. Bullock was smiling sadly at this dying dream when the Mountie symphonic band in the pit struck up the overture.

Victor Kornflower had won renown with such gay operettas as *The Gingerbread Cavalier* and *The Waltzing Widow* long before he fled his native Austria for Canada in 1936. From the moment of his arrival in Ottawa, he never ceased to celebrate his adopted land in word and song. His "Two Hearts in Maple Sugar Time" brought him

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to the forefront of Canadian music. Such tunesome and ever-popular works as "The Vagabond Voyageur," "The Sheik of Acadia," and "The Gypsy Snowman" secured his place there.

Unfortunately, his merry vision fled him in his old age and was replaced by an obsessive fear. He had heard of the weekly cribbage game between the exiled Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands and MacKenzie King, Canada's Prime Minister during the Second World War—the man's triumphantly shrill bachelor laughter as he pegged out was legendary. And he had heard that by the autumn of 1943, the horticultural section of the Dutch Resistance was mass-producing the Nineveh tulip, whose previously rare examples were found only amid ancient ruins. These the unsuspecting Germans were buying in vast quantities to brighten the concrete fortifications of Normandy and to decorate the Autobahn and airfields and public buildings back home. When the Nineveh tulips burst from the soil that next spring, they spread like rainbow wildfire, buckling highways and runways, toppling buildings, and reducing impregnable gun emplacements to rubble. The Allies thought the devastation that greeted them when they stepped ashore on D-Day came from their air raids and naval bombardments. The Dutch chose not to set them straight. Every country needs its secret weapon.

The final ingredient for the fevered stew of Kornflower's imagination was Operation Tambourine. MacKenzie King had had spiritualists recruited supposedly to help him contact his dear departed mother for tips on the conduct of the war. But now some whispered that his real intention had been to set up a code of ectoplasmic knocks by which she could signal him the contents of Queen Wilhelmina's cribbage hand. What if the Dutch should hear these whispers, too? Each year since the war they had presented Ottawa with a million tulip bulbs to commemorate the hospitality shown their Queen. What if one year the Dutch took a terrible revenge and sent tulips of the Nineveh tribe? So, as many Canadian madmen do, Kornflower came to dread the approach of spring. He was found dead one March morning with an ear frozen to a Public Archives flowerbed as though listening for doom in the underground rustle of the starting bulbs. The manuscript for his last operetta, *The Tulip Juggernaut,* was discovered in his overcoat pocket.

As the last note of the overture sounded, the curtain rose to reveal Ottawa's Parliament Hill with secretaries and bureaucrats striding to work singing the patter song, "Goodbye, Winter, How Goes It, Spring?" ("Au Revoir, Hiver. Ça Va, Printemps?") Then Nelson Ed-

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wards, playing the part of a government research-scientist, sang the touching "A Civil Service Kind of Love" to his fiancée, an econometrics forecaster for Statistics Canada, after which a column of Mounties marched on for the "Scarlet Tunics, Hearts of Gold" number, exiting with a troop of admiring children.

Suddenly the music turned sinister as Bullock and the other tulips started popping up through trapdoors for "The Tulip Gavotte," during which they kicked over park benches and trashcans. The Mounties returned to disperse them with pistol fire, but their bullets had no effect. As the jubilant flowers massed for the attack, the thin line of men in stetsons prepared themselves for certain death by singing the heartfelt "A Mountie Epitaph," which over the years had become a standby at Force-related weddings and funerals. At the end of the song, the tulips overwhelmed the gallant defenders and, as the first-act curtain fell, rushed offstage to destroy the Parliament Buildings.

A couple of times during "The Tulip Gavotte," Bullock had zigged when he should have zagged. (Say, Mr. Prime Minister, all those tulips are out of step but that strapping big pink one." "Yes, Mr. President, that's Acting Sergeant Bullock. A good man, eh, Commissioner?" "I'll say, Mr. Prime Minister. We've got great plans for him when the time's right.") When Bullock saw Inspector LaPierre heading in his general direction with a burr under his saddle, he thought it best to make himself scarce. LaPierre, his immediate superior, always occupied the little prompter's box amid the footlights for these productions. But he'd been taking a big interest in tulip choreography ever since Bullock signed on.

Bullock fled into the depths of backstage, where he was surprised to discover Inspector Duff and two of the Secret Service raincoats examining the Flower Gun. This large cannonlike contraption on a wheeled platform with a twenty-five-foot barrel had been built for the original production and was on loan from the Kornflower Wing of Toronto's Royal Ontario Museum. In the final scene of the operetta, amid the ringing of triumphant churchbells, the cannon is fired out over the audience, showering them with bright paper flowers. The loud bang, flash, and cloud of smoke were just for effect. The actual propellant was a large spring at the bottom of the barrel.

As the Secret Service was rummaging through a large heap of paper flowers with their feet, Duff, who was up on a stepladder, pulled his head from the cannon mouth and called down genially, "Hey, look who's here. It's Acting Sergeant Patio Pink himself. How goes the battle?" Without waiting for an answer, he descended, ex-

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plaining, "Right after the curtain went up, somebody backstage said, 'Hey, what say come the last act we fire the Flower Gun point-blank at the bigwigs in the Commissioner's box? Wouldn't that be a kick?' So the director asks if that'd be okay by us. Sure checks out harmless. Point-blank might be good for laughs all round. What do you think?"

Before Bullock could reply, he saw LaPierre bearing down on him, looking left and right. Quickly he ducked behind the Flower Gun and pretended to help the Mountie stagehands adjust the elevation of the cannon barrel. "Oh, hello there, Duff," he heard LaPierre say. "Seen anything of a certain dim bulb among the tulips, Bullock by name?"

"Sorry there, Inspector," lied Duff. Just then the first warning buzzer for Act Two sent LaPierre hurrying off toward the stairs down to the prompter's box.

With a grateful wave to Duff, Bullock started off to join the other tulips in the wings. But then he stopped dead and looked back at those around the Flower Gun. When he'd ducked behind the thing, he'd tramped down hard on a stagehand's foot—that one there, the chesty one in the Mountie coveralls, the one with the slicked-back, blue-black hair and the snub nose. The poor guy had sucked in his breath and uttered an almost inaudible "*¡Hi Chihuahua!*" Bullock narrowed his eyes and tugged thoughtfully at his lower lip. But then the second warning buzzer sounded. The curtain was about to go up. Bullock rushed away to join his comrades for the snappy goosestep of "The March of the Triumphant Tulips."

At the end of the number, Bullock was back in the wings, panting for breath and still debating whether the stagehand business was worth further investigation. Maybe the guy was a Son of Bernardo O'Higgins. But what if he was just from the Toronto detachment? '*¡Hi Chihuahua!*' was just the kind of thing that that bunch of oddballs might come up with.

Meanwhile, out on stage, the grim column of Canadian refugees burdened down with floor lamps, hockey sticks, and other valued possessions saved from the rampaging tulips had stopped at a triple signpost. Should they take the low road down into the States and lose their national identity in that vast melting pot? Or should they find refuge northward in the barren wastes above the treeline where surely the tulips could not go? And what about trekking across the country to the Rockies and making their stand there?

This last option was the cue for Edwards to shout, "Hey, let's go

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to Lake Louise and Banff!" His fiancée's reply—"Well, I've been to Lake Louise but how do you banff?"—led into the operetta's big dance number, "Hey, Everybody, Let's Do the Banff!" Kornflower's clever blend of bunny hop and conga joined the cast in a long line that wove and kicked ("One-two-three, banff! One-two-three, banff!") around the scenery and then off into the wings. When it snaked its way back out again, the pursuing tulips would be joined onto the line and kicking along with the rest.

As this moment of tulip activity approached, Bullock momentarily found himself pulled in opposite ways by two inviolable principles. Number one said that a Mountie always gets his man. Number two said the show must go on. This last choice he was sure would be Staff Sergeant Edwards'. Bullock was made of sterner stuff. Though LaPierre would skin him alive if his suspicions proved unfounded, he slipped away from the tulips and hurried back to where the stagehands were using styrofoam blocks to build a replica of Toronto which the tulips were to destroy at the end of the second act. (Some said this Destruction of Toronto scene guaranteed any of the operetta's touring companies an extra six months on the road.) But Bullock's man was not among the builders. He continued his search behind the scenes.

Meanwhile, back out on stage Edwards had been separated from his fiancée during the banff. Believing her to be with a refugee column taking the high road to the frozen tundra, he follows. Stranded there, he sings his blues number, "Eskimo Landlord." ("Got me an Eskimo landlord/ Who got him one mean, mean polar bear.")

As the song ended, Bullock was approaching that isolated corner backstage where the Flower Gun waited, outlined by the red light from an exit sign over a door. Funny, he hadn't remembered it this gloomy. Who but a Mountie, he asked himself with no little pride, would come here alone and unarmed, dressed in a tulip costume, to stalk a suicidal assassin wired to blow himself and anyone who messed with him to smithereens?

Suddenly, Masterpiece Theatre's drum-and-trumpet fanfare sounded in his inner ear and he heard Alistair Cooke's voice say, "When we last visited Commissioner Bullock, he was reminiscing to his young aide-de-camp, the wide-eyed Constable Fortesque, about his capture of the Son of Bernardo O'Higgins assassin. As we join them now in the snug little office we have come to know so well, with the buffalo head on the wall and the Jalna books in the bookcase, we find Bullock, leaning on the fireplace mantel, his elbow next to the Karsh

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photograph of 'good old Mavis,' as he affectionately calls his adoring wife, and staring into the bowl of his smoking pipe. So here we are, Episode 83 of our series based on Bullock's bestselling autobiography, *That Man in Scarlet.*"

Then Bullock heard his own voice say, "Yes, unarmed, young Fortesque. Except for my wits, of course. And alone—for I've always felt one Mountie more than a match for one suicidal—"

The sound of paper flowers under his feet brought Bullock back to reality. Funny, the pile of bright Flower Gun ammunition looked larger now. Bullock moved on cautiously. A noise like muffled lunatic laughter came out to greet him. Then the gloom deepened. The stage lights had been turned off except for a baby spot on Edwards' fiancée as she sang her big number, "Banffing Alone Under a Wild Alberta Moon." Bullock crept forward. Outside on the street he heard a patrol car wail like a hilltop wolf. He reached the spot where the exit sign kindled a campfire glow on the floor.

Suddenly a rustle of leaves made him spin around and instinctively make his hand into a pistol. When the man burst up from the pile of paper flowers, Bullock's index finger had already found his heart. "Dah!" he barked. The figure shuffled toward him into the red glow. Even as Bullock recognized him, Inspector Duff swayed and fell to the floor. Bullock's jaw dropped. Dah? He stared down at his index finger with disbelief.

The loony laughter came again, from right behind him now. Bullock turned. The stagehand he'd been looking for displayed a pearly smile and a pistol with a silencer. A round metal helmet with a large buttonlike protuberance on top was strapped under the man's chin. Wires coiled down from it to a vest of dynamite sticks visible through the open zipper of the Mountie coveralls. The man's feet stuttered a short flamenco on the floor. "Lucky Gomez Mahaffy, the Latin American Bombshell, at your service, señor," he smiled. "Heaven help us all but didn't Duff there come wandering back and catch me all wired up and raring to go. I guess he wasn't as dead as I thought when I buried him under the flowers. ¡*Hi Chihuahua!* that's some finger you've got there, compadre." He motioned Bullock to put up his hands.

But Bullock shook his head and gave the man that slightly cross-eyed but unflinching stare he used when lighting his pipe. "I see through your filthy little plan," he said sternly. "You mean to use the Flower Gun to fire yourself into the Commissioner's box and kill

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the occupants." He folded his arms over his chest. "Well, that'll be over my dead body."

"You've got me all wrong, hombre," declared Mahaffy. He waved the pistol at Duff's corpse and added in a voice which now sported a wheedle, "Sure and why don't you help old Gomez tidy up a bit? Just because I'm an anarchist doesn't mean I don't prize neatness."

Figuring the drill should be like hostage negotiations where you wear the guy down with tit for tat, Bullock demanded, "What's in it for yours truly?"

"Tell you what, me bucko," said Mahaffy, holding open the exit door, "you lend a hand here and I'll tell you what my plan really is, that I will."

After a moment's hesitation, Bullock dragged Duff's body out onto the roof and hid it in the shadows. Then he came back inside and heard Mahaffy out.

The man described his disappointment when he got the Canadian Prime Minister's name instead of the American President's at the Sons of Bernardo O'Higgins draw. Nevertheless, he'd been determined to carry out his suicide mission and honor his blood oath. He figured if he pulled off the assassination with flair he might even make a footnote in some anarchist history book. But his luck seemed to be changing when on his first day in Ottawa he learned that the Mountie glee club was doing *The Tulip Juggernaut*. It so happened that Mahaffy had learned his fluent English by joining one of those Young Foreign Friends of Canada clubs set up by Canada's embassies throughout Latin America. One year the big YFFC project had been staging *Juggernaut*. Mahaffy, who'd played a civil-servant extra, knew all about the Flower Gun and decided that, yes, that was how he'd do the deed.

"Sooner or later that fine broth of a boy, your PM, had to show up at a performance, right?" he insisted to Bullock. "I mean, there just isn't that much to do in Ottawa in the winter, eh, amigo?" But then he added, "Just to keep things moving along while I'm talking, why don't you take off your costume like a good lad. And the headdress, too."

Though he wasn't sure what this was all about, Bullock's eyes narrowed shrewdly. "I'll trade my outfit for your dynamite vest," he said. "And the helmet." When Mahaffy said, "Done!" it was hard for Bullock to keep from looking triumphant. He never thought the poor sap would fall for it.

As Bullock took off his costume, Mahaffy told how he'd hung

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around the glee-club clubhouse like a Mountie groupie until he spotted an unattended suit of regulation coveralls. "At the next rehearsal," said Mahaffy, "there I was, a Mountie stagehand—though, Begorrah, I sure don't have the jaw for it!"

"Few of us do," admitted Bullock, handing over the tulip outfit. He let Mahaffy fit him out with the dynamite vest and strap on the metal helmet. By godfrey, he thought, I've captured the initiative now. Before, he was the one who could blow us both up anytime he wanted to. Now it's me.

As Mahaffy dressed, he said, "Whenever another stagehand asked, 'Who the hell are you?' I'd say 'Toronto detachment' and they'd make a face and pass on by. When the rehearsals first moved here to headquarters, I was the muchacho lugging the heaviest stuff whenever we passed through Security downstairs. Nobody had the heart to ask for ID. Now they know my face so well it's just, 'How's it going, guy?' " Mahaffy strutted around a bit, admiring himself in the tulip outfit. "Then the luck of the Irish struck again," he said.

Bullock nodded. "The President of the United States arrived and the PM called a Command Performance."

"¡*Caramba!* I mean my winning the lottery last night. Two million dollars. *Mucho dinero.*"

"You lucky dog," marvelled Bullock.

"Ah, well now," said Mahaffy, "it did give me a bit of a problem, don't you see? We millionaires aren't much for the suicidal assassin game, *comprende?* But if I run, the Sons will hunt me down to the farthest corner of the earth, that they will. *Madre mia,* what was I to do?"

Here Bullock interrupted. "What say I put on your coveralls?" The dynamite vest provided hardly any warmth at all and he found it cold and drafty standing there in his shorts.

"What's in it for yours truly?" demanded Mahaffy. Then he said, "Tell you what, I get to tie your hands behind your back, you get the coveralls."

Bullock blinked and thought that one over. By godfrey, it *was* cold! And after all, hands free or tied, he was still a human bomb able to destroy them both with a butt of his head should the need arise. So he stepped into the coveralls and allowed himself to be tied.

Mahaffy pulled the coveralls up and over Bullock's shoulders and ran up the zipper. "So here I am tonight," he continued, tying the empty sleeves into a knot on Bullock's chest, "all duded out in the

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dynamite vest, wondering how I was going to wiggle out of my little dilemma when, saints be praised, who should arrive on the scene but yourself, God bless you for the lowest kind of Irish *cucaracha* imaginable that you are."

Bullock cleared his throat uncertainly. "But I'm not Irish. I'm Canadian of English origin."

Mahaffy's laugh was ugly. "*Compadre,* didn't I hear Duff call you Acting Sergeant Paddy O'Pink? And weren't the O'Pinks kings of Ireland? And wouldn't they hang their heads to see the sorry figure you've become, Paddy, selling out to the oppressors for a shabby red coat and a high rank in the Mounties?" Mahaffy rammed the barrel of his pistol up under Bullock's jaw and forced him backward until he collided with the Flower Gun stepladder.

" 'Acting Sergeant' isn't really all that high up there," croaked Bullock, though it hurt him to admit it.

"Paddy, Paddy, Paddy," said Mahaffy in tired disbelief. He used the pistol barrel to force Bullock up the ladder backward. "It'll be three birds of Irish extraction I'll be killing here tonight with one stone. With an RCMP Commissioner thrown in for good measure. You, Paddy, are going to be one of the birds and the stone, too. And when they collect your pieces, they'll find my identification in the pocket of those coveralls." They were standing together atop the stepladder now. "So the Sons of Bernardo O'Higgins will think me dead," Mahaffy continued, "and tomorrow's anarchist children will sing songs in school about Mahaffy, Martyr to the Cause!"

Bullock had to admit the guy cut a much more sinister figure in a tulip suit than he did. And the mad fire burning behind Mahaffy's eyes told him the time had come to leap headfirst to the floor below, blow himself up, and destroy them both. But, by godfrey, that was a hard thing to rush into. Maybe he could still talk the guy out of his crazy design.

But suddenly, as if he read Bullock's mind, Mahaffy spun him around and gagged him. Then he grabbed Bullock by the knotted sleeves and pulled him around again. Arching his back, Mahaffy lifted Bullock off his feet and lowered the surprised Mountie down the cannon barrel until only his head was visible.

Still holding the knotted sleeves, Mahaffy put his face close to Bullock's. "When the dirty deed's done, I'll find me another identity," he said. Then he smiled at a sudden idea. "¡*Hi chihauhau,* maybe I'll keep yours! With the Commissioner dead, everybody'll move up a notch. I'd be Sergeant Paddy O'Pink. A few well placed dynamite

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sticks might get me to the top in no time flat!" Mahaffy liked that. "Let's hear it for millionaire Mountie Commissioner Paddy O'Pink, tough but fair, beloved by all, and always quick with a nod and a wink and a look the other way whenever the Sons of Bernardo O'Higgins are up to their tricks!"

Bullock turned purple with indignation and struggled frantically to break from Mahaffy's grasp. The man watched for a bit. Then it ceased to amuse and he let go, sending Bullock on the long slide down to the bottom of the Flower Gun barrel.

Bullock heard the racket of the stepladder being dragged away.

In the long silence that followed, he worked to free his hands. But Mahaffy must have taken a YFFC knot-tying course, blast him. Bullock tried another tack. After a struggle, he got his knees up around his ears, braced his back against one side of the barrel, his feet against the other, and inched himself upward. Grunting and sweating, he managed to go about five of the twenty-five feet to the cannon mouth before his back and legs gave out. He tried to hold his ground but the barrel was smooth and he slid back down to the bottom.

As he lay there, breathing heavily, a plan took shape in his mind. He would relax and rebuild his strength. Then at the very last moment, just before the Flower Gun was fired, he would make his move. When things are nick-of-time like that, Mounties can tap into forces beyond those of ordinary men.

No, he wasn't an Easter Islander, that lunatic fringe on the Force that believed some Mountielike Intelligence polices the universe, moving among the galaxies to set up power-dispensing devices in their own image to assist defenders of justice everywhere. On the other hand, he and good old Mavis had attended one of their slide shows, which was part of last year's Mountie Cultural Affairs Program. Afterward, he had to admit that, by godfrey, those giant stone heads did have formidable jaws and, yes, he thought he made out the remnant of a narrow rim at the base of each tall forehead, a brimlike tracer as if, as the Easter Islander spokesman had insisted, some early tourists had chipped off and carried away with them the proof that these strange stone heads wore stetsonlike space helmets.

Bullock was still musing over the mystery of Easter Island when the stagehands came to push the Flower Gun into place for Act Three. He didn't waste his breath trying to shout through the gag. He'd save all his energy for the final moment when he'd move up

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the barrel like a well oiled machine. The cannon mouth grew into a dim moon above him as it was pushed out into the light. Here I come, Mahaffy, thought Bullock. I'm coming to get you!

Suddenly there was a commotion of questioning voices and the Flower Gun's progress stopped. Then Bullock heard the director speaking so close the man must have jumped up onto the cannon platform. "People!" he said. "People! A few minutes ago, a patrol car rushed our Staff Sergeant Edwards to the hospital. It's acute appendicitis, people. Now, darn it, here we are with an understudy down with the mumps and some pretty illustrious guests out there tonight. Is there anyone, I mean *anyone,* who can take Edwards' place?"

Bullock couldn't believe his ears. Here was his dream come true. He erupted into a frenzy of joyful energy. "I can! Bullock can!" he shouted into the gag as he arched his back and worked his way up the cannon barrel. He made the first five feet walking away. Then six. Then seven. "Bullock can! Bullock can!" But suddenly he recognized a voice that tore the heart from his efforts.

"I know the part, sir!" shouted Mahaffy.

"I don't recognize you, Mountie," answered the director.

"Acting Sergeant Paddy O'Pink, sir. Toronto detachment." Bullock joined in the groans from the cast and stagehands for he was on the slide back down to the bottom. "I understudied the part once, doing embassy security in Latin America," said the false Acting Sergeant.

"Then suit up, man," ordered the director.

Bullock lay panting at the bottom of the gun barrel as everyone took their places for the last act. By godfrey, he'd blown it. He'd made his move too soon and now he was done for.

As the curtain rose, he heard the strident music to which the tulips mimed their takeover of Canada's railroads and made themselves into a floral train that chuffa-chuffaed off to pillage the Prairie Provinces. If Bullock had a ghost of a chance, it would come in the next scene where the audience is transported to the tundra where refugees from the south work under sweatshop conditions carving small seals and polar bears for the tourist trade in a factory owned by Mr. Kyak, the Eskimo multimillionaire. This was the setting for Mahaffy's first song, "Soapstone Monday Mornings," where he tells the others how it came to him in a dream that the only way to destroy the tulips was to fight fire with fire. ("Petal not metal, that's the way we'll catch 'em./ Like against like'll do the job, yah, sure,

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you betchem.") Oh, please make him lousy, was Bullock's quiet prayer. If Mahaffy got booed off the stage, the operetta would have to stop and the bigwigs would depart safe and sound. Eventually Bullock might even be discovered down the Flower Gun.

But Mahaffy's strong, melodious voice earned him three curtain calls. Blast, thought Bullock. He could imagine what Constable Varley Dashwood, the vespine music critic for *The Scarlet Trumpet,* would write. "While your scribe joins the world in mourning the assassination of our beloved Commissioner, our Prime Minister, and the President of the United States at the headquarters theater, he would be remiss if he failed to note one bright spot among the carnage— to wit, the appearance of a bright new star in the firmament of Mountie music. A certain Acting Sergeant Paddy O'Pink from the Toronto detachment *(mirabile dictu)* stepped in to fill the shoes of the ailing Nelson Edwards and filled them well indeed. O'Pink, whose ancestors we understand were kings of Ireland, delighted this listener with a bel canto style reminiscent of McCormack himself, yet touched with the Latin fire of a Carreras. May we hope to hear more from O'Pink in the *affaires musicaux* of the Force?"

Bullock felt the Flower Gun tremble. The actors were pushing it out onstage now for the "Twilight of the Tulips" number. The music swelled as the flowers came face to face with the instrument of their destruction for the first time, the violins capturing the cold wind of apprehension blowing through their leaves.

It was almost time. Bullock tested his body, but concluded that his legs and back would never, never move again. Where was that strength Mounties were supposed to tap into at moments like this? Bullock tried focusing his mind's eye on Easter Island's giant stone heads. But they all stared back like that tony waiter when he'd taken good old Mavis out to dinner for her birthday. "I'm sorry, sir," the guy'd said, "that's not my table."

From the orchestra pit came the first notes of what, ironically, was Bullock's favorite Kornflower song. In "Diadem Dominion, Jewels from Sea to Sea," Mahaffy stood with the cannon-firing lanyard in his hand and sang a verse of praise to each Canadian province, beginning with Newfoundland on the East Coast. As he sounded the final note of the British Columbia verse, he would fire the Flower Gun and that would be all she wrote. Mahaffy would have dealt destruction to his enemies, won fame, money, and the esteem of school children—albeit anarchist ones—and stolen all of Bullock's dreams.

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By godfrey, no! Nobody but Maynard Bullock walks out on this stage an unknown and comes back a star! This thought stoked the boiler of Bullock's wrath. By the end of the first verse of "Diadem Dominion," he was working his way up the cannon barrel with a will that transcended aching back and legs. In fact, he did four feet before Mahaffy was even out of the Maritime Provinces. Yes, that was it. Mounties should look for their strength within themselves, not from the supernatural or another galaxy!

Bullock was pushing upward with a strong, confident motion now. It carried him through the Quebec and Ontario verses, partway into Manitoba and eight feet up the barrel. And nobody but Maynard Bullock uses Maynard Bullock's death as a rung on the ladder to Mountie Commissioner! This last outrage got him to the end of the Saskatchewan verse but only six more inches higher.

With a good sixteen feet to go and only two more verses left in the song, Bullock felt his strength fading fast. But then he had a vision of himself being catapulted with an apologetic look on his face into the laps of the occupants of the Commissioner's box, who clasped each other in horror. This terrible picture drove him up another six inches. But then every fiber of his body stalled. The game was over. He watched for the clutch of gravity.

But the inevitable downward slide never came. Bullock's last short desperate climb had carried him beyond the barrel's center of balance, tilting it down several inches. By godfrey, it wouldn't be a direct hit on the Commissioner's box now. If he could drop the barrel another inch he might even miss the balcony altogether. Hey, with the doors at the back of the auditorium open and the middle window in the foyer raised (as it somethmes was when the central heating got out of hand), he might come down right in the middle of the Rideau Canal and not detonate at all!

Bullock squirmed forward on his stomach. But he must have overtipped the balance for the cannon mouth thudded down onto the stage. Now he was sliding forward. In an instant he knew he would shoot out of the barrel, slide across the stage and out over the footlights into the orchestra pit. He found some meager satisfaction in the thought that though he would take a good part of the Mountie symphonic band with him, at least those in the Commissioner's box would be saved. Then his jaw hit the hardwood floor and he lost consciousness.

Later they told him he skidded across the stage on his jaw until he slammed helmet-first into the prompter's box, where the button

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of death came harmlessly to rest inside LaPierre's wide, astonished mouth. They also told him how Mahaffy panicked, drew his pistol, and leaped from the stage to escape up the center aisle. But a brace of raincoats with ouzis sitting in the front row made him do a brief midair jib-fandango before his riddled body found peace in the cello section of the orchestra pit.

The night was cold and the moon full. As Bullock walked home, fingering his aching and swollen jaw, an infectious banffing beat came to him from high overhead. Was it Kornflower's Scholars, as the first flock of wild geese each spring were called? A legend of the Fifties had it that one afternoon while university students were celebrating the end of Christmas exams in the King Cole Room of Toronto's Park Plaza Hotel, a cloaked figure sitting at a dark corner table suddenly rose and shouted, "Hey, everybody, let's do the Banff!" Trancelike, the best young minds in Canada left their beer and converged on the cloaked figure, and, banffing all the way, followed him out into a fine Toronto blizzard and were never seen again. The tabloids said they had sold their souls for higher grades and the Devil had collected his price. Was it good luck or bad to hear them? Bullock could never get it straight. But that wasn't important. He was a Mountie and Mounties made their own luck.

If only they could make their jaws, too. Bullock stopped to examine his in a shop window. The swelling had made it temporarily quite magnificent. And, by godfrey, without the moustache he'd be the spitting image of You-Know-Who himself!

Bullock jammed his hands deeper into his overcoat pockets and continued his walk, musing on this interesting discovery. Soon dire headlines and solemn talking heads were crowding his mind, as newspapers and television warned that the Novaya Zemlyz incident had brought civilization to the brink of war. The world turned to Canada's Prime Minister, whose friendship with the U.S. President and the Soviet First Secretary was as well known as his powers of persuasion were legendary. (The First Secretary was said to be related on his mother's side to the Russo-Irish hero of the Second World War, Marshal Tim O'Shenko.)

From Nairobi, where he was guest of honor at a Friends of Extraterrestrial Visitors convention, the Prime Minister called for an Ottawa summit the very next day so the two rival heads of state could sit down with their Canadian host and thrash the whole thing out. This offer was accepted with alacrity by both sides. But the next

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morning, on his way back to Ottawa, as the Prime Minister waited between planes in the coffee shop of the Tirana, Albania, airport he was recognized by Marshal Glinka, the Albanian ruler, who had stepped in for a wedge of pie. Glinka's fourth marriage was going badly. And if he could not have peace at home he did not see why there should be peace anywhere in the world. The Marshal signaled to lurking henchmen, who dropped a gunnysack over the Prime Minister's head and hustled him into the labyrinth of secret tunnels by which the Albanian leader kept his finger on the faint pulse of the Tirana bureaucracy and satisfied his craving for fresh pastry.

Later that morning, Canada's Governor-General sounded close to hysteria over the phone. Without the Prime Minister's calming presence to keep the American and the Russian from each other's throats, the afternoon's summit would end in mutual declarations of war. "This would mean the end of modern civilization," he insisted. "So it's up to you again, Maynard."

Bullock put down the phone and punched a button on his desk. In an instant, a smartly dressed constable wearing an aide-de-camp's aigrette was standing at attention before him.

"I want a razor, shaving cream, and a wooden mallet," said Bullock.

"A wooden mallet, sir?"

"Yes, young Fortesque," said a grim but determined Commissioner Maynard Bullock of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police as he fingered his jaw, "a large wooden mallet."

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a *NEW* short story by

BRENDAN DuBOIS

"Want to go for a walk, Diane? We could go combing along the river, see what's there."

"Nope."

"We could borrow Grandma's and Grandpa's bikes and—"

"Look, Brad," Diane said, "I don't feel like doing anything, okay? I just wanna sit here for a while."

It is the summer of '67 and Brad Woods, twelve, is finding out what a difference three years in age can make when you're growing up . . .

STILL WATERS

by BRENDAN DuBOIS

Each weekend during the summer, our family would go to my grandparents' camp on the Bellamy River, which cuts through the rural countryside of Devon, New Hampshire, and empties into Great Bay, which in turn leads to the Atlantic. We called it a camp, but it was a large, rambling house, built close to the bank of the river. On the grassy lawn out back, Grandfather and Grandmother Woods would sit in metal-and-fabric lawn chairs, cold drinks in their hands, welcoming each car and station wagon that rolled in on the dirt driveway. There would be our family, and those of my two uncles on my dad's side, and all my cousins. We'd spend all day playing on and around the river and exploring the forest surrounding the cottage. At night while the adults slept in foldaway beds, we kids would be in sleeping bags on the large wide porch, joking and telling ghost stories and playing with flashlights. At night you could see fireflies flitting about the lawn and the dark river and sometimes sheets of

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heat lightning flashed in the sky far away. It was on one of those weekends in 1967 when I was twelve that my cousin Todd disappeared.

On that July day, it seemed like any other warm summer day. Grandfather and Grandmother Woods sat in their lawn chairs and all of us cousins were racing around, getting underfoot. My grandfather, a retired fire captain from the Devon Fire Department, had his shirt off, a cigar in his mouth, and a highball in his hand, and he halfheartedly swung at us as we ran by. His chest hair was snow white and ashes from the cigars that would kill him in four years scattered on his wrinkled skin. Grandmother Woods sat with her thin hand on his wrist as if she was afraid he would suddenly leave her, murmuring, "Now, Helen, slow down—Brad, put down that axe," while Grandfather took a puff on his cigar and said, "Goddamn it, stop picking on them, Margaret, they're just kids."

With a glass of grape Kool-Aid in my hand, I went to see my older sister, Diane, who was fifteen. She was sitting in the screened-off gazebo at one end of the lawn and I went in and joined her. In the past couple of years, Diane had changed so much that sometimes I found it hard to believe she was still my sister. Her voice had changed some and as she had grown taller her skinny hips and chest had filled out. I found it all mysterious and fascinating. Oh, I knew it was puberty and all that. My oldest brother Ned was two years older than Diane and starting to shave and a horrible acne was scarring his face red. But Diane's skin never changed and I remember hearing Dad whisper to Mom one night, "She's a looker, Doris. We're going to have trouble when she gets older, you'll see."

I sat across from her in the gazebo. Her legs were stretched out and her arms were crossed over the blue T-shirt she had on, and her feet were slowly scuffing the dirt on the floor.

"Hi," I said.

"Hi."

My Kool-Aid in an old Welch jelly container was cold. "Want to go for a walk, Diane? We could go combing along the river, see what's there."

"Nope."

"We could borrow Grandma and Grandpa's bikes and—"

"Look, Brad," she said, her green eyes hard and bright, "I don't feel like doing anything, okay? I just wanna sit here for a while."

My throat tightened up and I tried to hide it by drinking some

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Kool-Aid, but it didn't help. Diane sighed and threw her blonde hair back and stared out through the screen of the gazebo. Then I saw her face perk up, like she saw something important go by, and I looked behind me and saw our cousin Todd walk away from the lawn with his fishing gear. I looked back at Diane and she was staring at him. Then she looked at me.

"Hey, you're bugging me, okay?" she said.

I just nodded and got out. It was something that had been happening a lot lately. It used to be that Diane and I were best friends and did a lot of things together, like playing kickball with the Somersons up the street, or she'd help me with my math homework. She was my big sister and had always looked out for me. There was this time the Andersons' dog chased me on my paper route and bit me on the ankle. The next day she rode out with me with a spray bottle of detergent and when the dog started after us, she sprayed it with the detergent and it went yapping off and never bothered me again. But now she spent a lot of time in her room, a Do Not Disturb sign up on her door. Almost overnight, it seemed, her wall posters of horses and mountains had been replaced with leather-dressed rock stars. Not only was I left to do my homework by myself but I wasn't encouraged to share my thoughts with her any more, either.

Outside on the back lawn, the barbecue ranges were set up and my mom and dad were huddled over the hibachi, grilling steaks. Dad was wearing his cut-off jeans and Mom had on her white slacks and red shirt she tied at the front. Sitting next to my grandparents were Uncle Felix and Aunt Tracy. Their two children, Hannah and Helen—ten-year-old twin girls—were busy playing on the grass. Todd's parents, Uncle Gil and Aunt Meg, were taking suitcases out of their car and I waved at them as I went by. I liked all of my aunts and uncles—especially Aunt Tracy, who was sitting on the grass next to my grandma, smoking a cigarette. Last summer I was swimming out on the river and got cramps up both my legs. I started thrashing around, choking on the salty, cold water, and she leaped from her lawn chair and made a perfect dive into the river to rescue me.

I walked along the river bank, keeping my eyes open for trash and such that had been washed ashore. The Bellamy is a tidal river and at low tide, when the mud flats are exposed, you can find things like lobster traps, buoys, life jackets, and old bottles. Across the

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river, toward Porter, there's MacIntosh Air Force Base and once I found a burnt-out parachute flare.

Up ahead was an abandoned camp that hadn't been lived in for years, and on the rotting dock that extended out into the river I saw my cousin Todd. I didn't like Todd that much, but there was something about him that fascinated me. He was sixteen and big, almost as big as my dad, and from what I heard at night, when my parents thought I was asleep, I knew he'd been in some trouble at school and with the police—once for breaking into a neighbor's house.

I went out on the dock, the grey wood creaking and splintering under my feet. Todd was sitting on the edge, his thick hairy legs swinging back and forth. He wore cut-offs and a shirt with its sleeves cut off at the shoulders, leaving ragged threads. When he saw me approach, he quickly snapped away the cigarette he'd been smoking into the river. "What do you want?" he said.

His voice chilled me, and when I came closer he put down his fishing pole and reached into his tackle box, taking out a slender fish knife. There was a silver-grey fish at his side and I suddenly wished I'd stayed back with the others.

"Nothing," I said.

"Good," he shot back, " 'cause nothing is what I got for you."

He reached down and grabbed the fish with practiced ease, and with quick, grinding motions he cut off the fish's head. Then he sliced off the tail and, tucking in the edge of the knife in one smooth motion, slit the fish open, belly to end.

" 'Cepting, of course, unless you want some fish guts or something," he laughed, tossing a pink-drab piece of fish innards at me. I backed away but it landed, slimy and cold, on my bare arm. I knocked it off and started walking away, the glass of Kool-Aid still in my hand, feeling about six years old, not liking the stinging feeling of tears in my eyes. Todd laughed and called out, "Hey, say hi to your sister for me." I pretended not to hear and kept on walking, my Keds sneakers making squishing noises on the mud flats. Every now and then I'd step close to a submerged clam and it would jet up a stream of water. I'd always wondered if it did that out of fear or anger.

Back at the camp, everyone was still out on the lawn except for Diane, who was still sitting by herself in the gazebo. One part of the lawn jutted out to the river and a large pine tree overhung a small cove. From one of the weathered branches, a length of rope

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hung over the banking, and my uncles and my brother Ned used it to swing into the river like Tarzan. Uncle Felix was standing next to my grandfather.

"What do you think, Dad?" he asked. "Is the water deep enough for a swing?"

"Well," Grandfather said, "the water's still enough. But you can't trust still waters. Often as not, they're hiding rocks or snags or something underneath the surface, something that can grab you and hurt you. Give it another hour—the tide should be up by then."

The barbecue grills were going strong by then. I had a hamburger and some chips before drifting away from the back lawn and went into my grandparents' house. Up on the second floor, I found a book and went to my secret place, on part of the floor facing the river—through the two spare bedrooms to where there's a window over the porch roof. I shimmied through the open window onto the roof. The roof had a high ledge built around it and I was hidden from everyone on the ground even though I could see them. On the right side of the porch, near where the forest started, an oak grew up next to the porch, and a couple of times at night I'd climbed down off the roof from the tree.

I lay back on the sticky, warm shingles and read *The Martian Chronicles* as the afternoon drifted on, every now and then looking up to see what was going on. Out on the hills on the other side of the Bellamy River a large bank of dark-blue thunderclouds were massing and the air started feeling heavy and hot. There was a loud splash and I saw Uncle Gil in the water and then Uncle Felix swinging out on the Tarzan rope, letting it go with a yelp and a holler as he fell into the river, a thick plume of spray rising up after him.

Below me, Diane walked out of the gazebo and over to Grandpa, talking to him about something, and then Grandpa checked his watch and she said something else and walked to the house. I half listened as I read about the Martians dying and curling up like dead leaves, but there was no sound of a door being opened and closed downstairs. A little later I heard some wood snap and I looked over to the woods, and there was Diane, walking into the woods.

As the afternoon went on, I closed Ray Bradbury's book and slipped down to the kitchen, where Grandma always kept a jug of lemonade on ice. I brought a glass back up to the roof with me.

Down on the lawn, my uncles, my father, and Grandfather were sitting on lawn chairs next to an ice cooler, all of them drinking

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from brown beer bottles and listening to a Red Sox game on a transistor radio. At the picnic table, Aunt Tracy and Aunt Meg sat talking with my mother over iced drinks. The twins were running in circles around Grandma. I didn't see Diane. From the porch roof, I could barely see the tip of the dock to the left downstream—it was too far away to see if Todd was still there.

Out across the river the sky was getting darker and I saw the first flare of lightning, then heard the slow rumble of thunder. The wind picked up, causing the pines and the willows to sway and bend. The gusts blew warm and cold, and made me shiver. I went back to *The Martian Chronicles* but I had trouble concentrating.

Then a thrashing noise off in the woods made me put down the book. I crawled to the edge of the porch and caught a glimpse of Diane running from the trees and into the house. There was the slam of the downstairs door and I crept back inside and downstairs.

I heard water running and what sounded like sobs from the bathroom off the kitchen. The bathroom door was open about two feet. I looked in and my legs felt cold.

Diane was standing at the sink, her blonde hair tangled with burrs and twigs and her tanned legs and arms scratched a bright red. Tears were streaking down her cheeks and she was washing her hands and arms furiously. The water in the sink was a rusty-brown color. Then she saw me in the mirror and turned to me. "Brad!" she said, her voice a hoarse whisper. "Get the hell out of here!"

"Diane, what's the matter?" I tried to step in but she put her foot against the door.

"Just get out," she sobbed. "And don't tell anybody about this!" And she reached out and slammed the door.

I stood listening to the water run and then I went outside to the back lawn. Grandma was now at the picnic table with my mother and my aunts and Hannah and Helen were stretched out on a blanket nearby. The men were still listening to the game through the static on the radio and sent up a collective groan when Yaz struck out.

Dad took a long swallow of beer. "Hey, Brad," he said when he saw me. "Have you seen Diane around?"

I thought for only a second.

"She's in the house, I think. I saw her a while ago reading in the study."

"Oh."

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"Todd should be back soon, unless they're really biting," Uncle Gil said. He twisted in his chair and looked at the dark bank of clouds approaching behind him. "Storm'll be hitting soon."

Grandpa nodded. "I'd give it a half hour." He relit his cigar and reached over to the ice cooler next to him, rummaging around in the ice. "Out of beer," he said. "I'll have to go in and get some more."

I thought of Diane, sobbing and washing herself in the bathroom off the kitchen and something dark and horrible began to come over me. I said, "I'll go in, Grandpa."

He was starting to say something about stretching his legs when Diane walked out. She had changed into slacks and a long-sleeved shirt and she waved at us as she went to join the others at the picnic table. Her face was freshly washed and her hair was combed, and she had an easy smile on her face. It made me think of my grandfather talking about still waters, and how they hide things.

After another inning and a half (the Red Sox 4, the Senators 3), Aunt Meg came over to us, a strained look on her face. By that time the wind had picked up and lightning and thunder were really flaring and booming from across the river. "Gil," she said to my uncle, "I'm getting worried about Todd. He's been out there all afternoon and the storm's coming."

"He's probably got a good run on, that's all."

"Gil," she repeated, and something in her tone made him put down his beer bottle and get to his feet.

"C'mon, Gil," Dad said. "We'll go track that rascal down."

They headed downstream, along the river bank, beers in hand. I watched them until they were out of sight, and from the hills on the other side a bolt of lightning, jagged and bright, was followed by a long rumble of thunder. Aunt Meg was back at the picnic table, her arms around her like she was cold, and she sat a distance from Diane and the others as if she wanted to be alone with her thoughts. Grandpa and Uncle Felix were still in their chairs by the radio, but by the way they kept looking downstream I knew the game no longer held their interest. I felt like I was holding my breath.

It was almost dark when Dad and Uncle Gil came back, walking fast, their faces serious. Aunt Meg held herself tighter and Uncle Gil went over to her. Dad came over and said to Uncle Felix and Grandpa, "He's gone. His pole and some fish and his tackle box are on the dock, but he's not there. The end of the dock is all splintered

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and cracked. He could've fallen in the river before he knew what was happening."

Just then the rain started to fall, easy at first, just a few drops. "There are ponchos and flashlights in the cellar," Grandpa said. "You three boys better start looking in the woods down there and in Boulger's cottage. He might be smoking or something in the cellar."

"We already checked there," Dad said.

"Then check it again." Grandpa got up and dropped his cigar. Aunt Meg was at the table, her head in her hands, crying. "Everybody in the house," Grandpa called. "We'll call the fire and police, they'll find him. Come on, everybody inside."

The twins were sleepy and whiny, but they shut up when they saw the tight look on everyone's faces. My stomach started fluttering as I walked into the house behind Diane. Grandpa sent the two of us upstairs with the twins, who were told to go to bed. Diane and I were in the two spare bedrooms on the river side of the house.

"Diane," I started, but she glared at me and went into her room and huddled in a corner of the bed, her legs crossed, her arms across her chest, shivering.

"Just shut the door, okay?" she said.

I shut the door between the two bedrooms and looked out the window. From downstairs I could hear Aunt Meg crying, then I saw my dad and Uncle Gil and Uncle Felix crossing the back yard in the rain, their heavy flashlights in their hands, their ponchos flapping around their bare legs. The rain was heavy now, hiding the view of the other bank, and the thunder cracked and boomed. I stood at the window for a long time, watching the lightning and seeing the tiny lights downstream where my uncles and Dad had gone, and I thought of Diane in the next room and how she had gone into the woods. Heading upstream.

The room suddenly felt cold as I again hooked onto the memory of her facing down that dog on my paper route with a spray bottle. Trembling, I went to my suitcase and pulled out my raincoat and flashlight, then I quietly opened the window onto the porch and stepped outside.

I was gone for an hour. When I returned to my room by the same route, I was soaked, tired, and covered with mud. In the next room, Diane was totally silent. I wanted to talk to her, but instead I cleaned myself up the best I could and went to bed . . .

The search went on for days—in the woods and on the river itself.

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The fire department sent in a boat, as did the State Fish and Game Department, but all they found was Todd's fishing gear and tackle box on the dock. He was never seen again.

Some stories end. Others go on. Twenty years later, I am a husband and father working as an assistant editor for a small daily newspaper in southern New Hampshire. Grandfather died, as I've said, four years after Todd disappeared and Grandmother followed him soon after. My parents are now Grandpa and Grandma and have their own camp, up on Milton Pond. We visit them, along with my older brother Ned (who was off at summer school that summer of '67) and his wife and three kids. We have good times. My grandparents' camp was sold right after the death of my grandmother. No one in the family expressed interest in buying it.

After that summer Todd disappeared, Diane changed even more. To my parents' dismay, she eventually dropped out of high school and married a diesel mechanic in Porter, who she left after six years. He had given her two children, several thousand dollars in debts, a broken nose, and a black eye. I tried to stay in touch with her but it wasn't easy. She was always on the go, moving from one apartment complex or mobile home to another, as if she was being chased. I had a good idea what that was. Only once did she ever mention it. When I was in college, she sent me a Christmas card, and underneath her signature she'd written: "You know, don't you?"

In the card I sent her, I added, "Yes, I do."

And that was that until last week, when my mother called to tell me Diane was in the Porter Hospital. It was an overdose of pills. Whether it was accidental or on purpose, no one was saying, but my mother was hoping it was accidental.

Diane had a private room and was alone when I visited her. Her long blonde hair had been cut and processed so that it was now curly, but I could still see some of that fifteen-year-old girl in her. She was very thin but her face was fleshy and flushed. I stood by her bed holding her hand, and she gave me a weak smile. "I've been an awful sister, haven't I, Brad?" Her voice was thick, as if she was on medication.

"No, you haven't," I protested.

"Yes, I have, and you know why. God, how can anybody expect to live like that, all these years, with all that guilt."

I squeezed her hand and she turned her head, like she was talking to a memory.

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"I was spunky back then, when I was fifteen. I knew it and so did the boys. But the only boy I was interested in was Todd. How stupid can a girl be? My own cousin, but I was in love with him all right—his swagger and that cocky look on his face. A couple of times on family picnics we'd sneak out and fool around. A little kissing, nothing else much. Except for that weekend."

She turned and looked at me. Her eyes were moist with tears. "Surprise you?"

"No, not much."

"Then you're smarter than I thought at the time. That afternoon we set a time to meet by a stand of birches in the woods upstream. He was on time, with a big smile on his face. We started doing the usual things, but then—well, he changed, Brad. It was awful. His face changed and he started trying to take off my clothes with his fish knife. I grabbed a branch and hit him on the head. He dropped the knife. His head was bleeding and he was swearing at me—God, the mouth he had—and I picked up the knife. I was so scared, Brad! It didn't take long, and I covered him up the best I could with dirt and branches before I came back to the house."

"You didn't know what you were doing," I said.

She sighed deeply, and was quiet a while.

"It's been hell wondering from day to day if they'd find his body. I'd be somewhere, at a movie or something, and I'd find myself having fun, and a little voice inside me would say, Tomorrow, maybe they'll find his bones tomorrow. And family reunions? Forget it. How could I look Aunt Meg or Uncle Gil in the eyes knowing what I did?"

She was growing more agitated.

"The thing is," she said, "I've always been surprised that I haven't been caught. I didn't—cover him that well."

If only she had talked to me years ago.

"Hey, big sis," I said. "Have you been down to the camp at all?"

She closed her eyes. "Not since Grandpa died."

"I was down there last spring. The whole area's been bought out. There's a restaurant there now. And the woods and those white birches are gone. That whole area's a parking lot, concrete and asphalt. They'll never find anything there now, Diane."

After that, she cried some, still keeping hold of my hand. We talked for a while more, and then when I was leaving she said, "Our secret, right, Brad?"

"Our secret, Diane."

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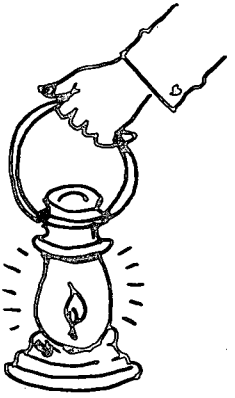
That was a week ago. Diane's out of the hospital now and the last time I saw her, up at our parents' camp, she was smiling and didn't have the look of something chasing her. It felt good to see that.

And me? Well, I'm getting along pretty well, though I do have my own burdens to carry. As Diane said, we have our secrets.

When I went out in that driving rainstorm twenty summers ago and searched the woods, I found the soggy mass of dirt and leaves and the naked arm underneath it and I dug a deeper hole and buried my cousin in it. It was hard to do and it hasn't been easy since, but I couldn't do any less for my sister Diane, who had always looked out for me.



DETECTIVERSE

THE ULTIMATE TEST

by WILLIAM F. SMITH

A bandit who robbed with great zest
Was jailed at his girl friend's request.
He committed the crime
Almost all of the time
And she felt that he needed arrest.

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a *NEW* short story by

HELEN NIELSEN

"Nothing worse can happen to an officer than to see his partner killed," Pauley said.

To which Rusty Wagner's father might add an even deeper and more horrible truth.

Our first story in 16 years from the celebrated Helen Nielsen—who in Twentieth Century Crime and Mystery Writers *says, "The mystery is still the most demanding form of fiction. No matter how deep the gore flows or how high the bodies are stacked, there must be logic in each crime and no loose ends dangling after the last page . . ."*

LINE OF FIRE

by HELEN NIELSEN

The man drove down from the White Mountains in a four-year-old king-cab pickup. He was tall enough to fill that cab with barely enough clearance for his grey cattleman's hat and lean enough to make his weathered face appear older than forty-six years. He wore a sheepskin coat, but changed to a brown-corduroy jacket at a gas and coffee shop at Florence Junction. Even then the jacket was uncomfortable by the time he reached the city. It was just eleven o'clock in the morning, so he drove directly to the downtown police headquarters. He was on a mission he never wanted to undertake, in order to do a thing he had never expected to do in his lifetime.

A swarm of activity inside the building precluded inquiry, so he made his way unescorted to the open door of Lieutenant Vernon Pauley's office. The two men inside took no notice of his arrival. One, barrel-chested and with a shock of greying hair, was seated at

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the desk. Facing him stood a younger officer whose uniform appeared to have been slept in on a regular basis.

"Sergeant Deaver, are you still here?" the seated man queried. "You're off duty in the daytime, aren't you?"

The sergeant nodded. "I stayed on to write up this report on Officer Torres' death," he explained. "After the ambulance arrived, I joined the search for the killer's grey sedan. When I came in, the place was so full of reporters and TV cameras I couldn't so much as write my own name."

"And twenty-four hours later they're still hanging around," Pauley agreed. "Tell me, Deaver, do you think the killer was a drug dealer?"

"Probably. A lone car in that bank parking lot at two A.M. looked suspicious. He could have been waiting for a contact. One thing's sure, he wasn't about to be searched. Lieutenant, I told Torres to stay in the car while I investigated, but he walked right into that gun. I guess a rookie always wants to make waves. I'd like to go back to working alone."

Pauley scanned the report as the sergeant spoke. "So you did knock the gun out of the killer's hand and fire it as he sped away. At least we have the weapon."

"It's at ballistics. I doubt it can be traced."

"I'm afraid you're right," Pauley agreed. "It looks like a professional job. —And you look exhausted. Nothing worse can happen to an officer than to see his partner killed. Get out of here now. Take off a few days and try to let go of it."

Pauley looked up from the report as he spoke. When his gaze came in line with the doorway, he reacted with surprise and shock. The man in the doorway had removed his hat, loosening a cascade of red, wavy hair. He stood well over six feet in heeled boots, and spoke in a quiet voice. "I'm supposed to see Lieutenant Pauley. My name is Raymond Wagner, Senior."

"Senior," the lieutenant repeated and the tension level plummeted. "Come in, Mr. Wagner. You gave me a start. The resemblance to your son is remarkable!"

"It sure is!" the sergeant echoed.

"Deaver—go home."

The sergeant didn't delay. He sidled through the doorway, still eyeing Wagner, and passed from view. "I'm sorry you were kept waiting," Pauley apologized. "We had a personal tragedy here night before last. We're all pretty preoccupied."

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Wagner didn't comment. He had trouble of his own. "I came about my son," he said. "May I see him now?"

Pauley removed a suede jacket from the back of his chair. It covered the service revolver on his hip when he put it on. "I'll take you over myself," he said. "You made good time getting here. Did you drive all night?"

"All morning," Wagner corrected. "I was on a hunting trip with my younger son when your office called the ranch. It was early this morning before I got the message."

"Then you really did make good time. I heard it was snowing in the mountains." The weather was of no importance, but what else was there to talk about on the way to the morgue?

A part of Wagner's mind still insisted it was only a bad dream, but he followed like a sleepwalker as the lieutenant led the way to a large white room with a white-tile floor where an attendant pulled out a drawer from the wall and shattered the fantasy. This was reality: the body of a red-haired boy whose blue eyes would never again open, whose generous mouth would never again smile—because an ugly wound in his chest had ended a life used only nineteen years.

Wagner choked out the required words. "Yes, that's Rusty. That's my son." It seemed a betrayal. He wanted to cry out that it wasn't Rusty—it was an impostor. "Who did this to him?" he demanded.

"A Smith and Wesson .38 was found beside the body," Pauley answered. "It fired the shot that killed your son. His are the only prints on it."

"Wait a minute," Wagner protested. "Are you trying to say that Rusty committed suicide? He had no reason!"

"No suicide has a reason that's valid to anyone but himself—especially a teenager. Of course, it might have been accidental."

"I can't buy that. Rusty hunted with me for meat on the table since he was twelve. That boy had respect for a weapon."

"Unless he had been drinking or using a controlled substance."

"Drugs, you mean? Not Rusty! I won't let you write off my son as a drunk or an addict. If I took your gun from you right now and shot you dead, I could wipe off my fingerprints and substitute yours. You know that."

If Wagner hadn't looked so capable of carrying out the suggestion, the lieutenant might not have backed down so quickly. "Don't get

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so upset, Mr. Wagner," he protested. "We won't know anything definite until after the autopsy."

"There's a bruise on my son's left cheek," Wagner said. "He could have been in a fight."

It was a small bruise, hardly more than a scratch, but the lieutenant didn't try to explain it away. "The autopsy will cover everything," he promised, "and I have a detective on campus today checking out your son's relationships for possible bad blood. I questioned the young lady who discovered his body yesterday. Pamela Foster. Do you know her?"

"Rusty mentioned her a few dozen times. We've never met."

Lieutenant Pauley took a notebook and pen from his pocket and began to write. "I'll give you her telephone number. She seems to be a nice girl. I know you'll want to see her. Now, when the autopsy is complete, the body will be released to the undertaker of your choice. Where are you staying, Mr. Wagner?"

It was all so efficient—like communicating with an answering machine. "I haven't made any plans," Wagner said. "But you can reach me at The Gathering. It's a restaurant."

"Best steakhouse in the city," Pauley remarked. "That's Sally Turner's place. Do you know her?"

"We go back a ways."

"Good! That's what you need right now—to be with a friend."

A friend. Sally was that for sure, and it was strictly here's-your-hat-what's-your-hurry time at police headquarters.

When Wagner entered The Gathering, he ignored the busy dining room and went directly to his usual booth in the bar. The walls were covered with old photographs of Sally Turner in her rodeo days, and Wagner was with her in more than a few of them. They were from the "before Martha" era. Martha was the surprise bride he brought back from Ruidoso, where he had gone shopping for another kind of filly. Two weeks later, Sally married Tim Turner on the rebound, but that was ancient history. Tim drank too much, drove too fast, and died in his mangled Cadillac within a year. And it was five years since Martha was laid to rest in the churchyard near the ranch.

A pretty waitress in a cowgirl costume brought a menu Wagner had no chance to open before Sally slid into the booth beside him. "Red Wagner will have the best steak in the house—blood rare," she ordered. "But first bring a sour mash on the rocks and a Dos Equis.

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No, make that two beers, honey. I can't stand to see a man drink alone."

Sally might touch up her hair to maintain that golden color, but her figure hadn't changed since the rodeo photos. She placed a warm hand over one of Wagner's and squeezed hard. "Your foreman called to tell me what happened. Oh, Red, I'm so *damned* sorry."

Wagner didn't know how much he needed the whiskey until after the first swallow. The warmth that spread through his body began to ease the tension and loosen his tongue. "That Lieutenant Pauley doesn't care what happened to Rusty," he complained. "All any of the police are concerned about is some officer who was killed."

"You sure got that right, Red. The boys in blue do take care of their own."

The words came from a handsome Indian of indeterminate age as he deposited the steaming steak platter on the table. He wore a white starched shirt and a black bowtie. His name was Joseph, but he had been billed as "Injun Joe" in his rodeo days.

"What's this savage doing wearing a bowtie?" Wagner demanded.

Joseph grinned. "Sally made me *maitre d'*. Pay's good but I don't like the fringe benefits."

"And you don't like those 'damned badges,' " Sally added. "Pay no attention to him, Red. Pauley's Okay. He's under a lot of fire over this cop killing. There's talk a drug dealer is involved."

"In that case, the police should question some of those professors out on campus," Joseph said, "or maybe some of their own."

"Joe, shut up. I haven't made you janitor yet, but I should. You pick up more dirt than a vacuum cleaner. Red isn't interested in our local scandals."

The steak was disappearing fast, and the waitress brought another whiskey as soon as a glass was empty. "I sure am interested," Wagner said, "but I haven't slept since I can't remember when. I've got to get moving and find a motel."

"I'm going to pretend I didn't hear that," Sally remarked. She took a house key from her purse and slid it across the table. "I'll be late tonight. A wedding party's coming in and I won't leave until it's over. But you know where my house is. Take any bed you want."

"You'll never get a better offer," Joseph said. "And if you come up empty on this so-called police investigation, Red, let me know. I've got a cousin who's into tribal rituals. He might conjure up a vision of what happened to Rusty."

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"If I chewed as much peyote as that cousin of Joseph's," Sally scoffed, "I'd have visions, too."

Wagner knew he wouldn't be allowed to pay for the food and drink, but he wanted to leave a tip for the waitress. When he dropped some bills on the table, Pauley's note fell open beside them. "Pamela Foster," Sally read.

"Do you know her?"

Sally fell into a momentary silence, as if trying to decide how much she wanted to say. "I've met her. Rusty brought her in a few times."

"I've got to call her. She found Rusty's body." He started to dig in his pocket for coins.

Sally smiled. "Maybe you don't remember, Red, but my house has all the modern conveniences—even a telephone."

Sally's house was a few miles from the restaurant. Traffic thinned as the street wound upward, leaving the city spread out in a hollow bowl while an impending sunset lengthened shadows on foothills ahead. But no exterior spectacle could compare to the sight of the welcoming beds inside the house. Wagner glanced in on the master bedroom—pink and feminine as Sally in her non-professional hours. It was Sally's room, but this wasn't Sally's grief. This grief belonged to Red Wagner and his memories of Martha. He moved on to a guest room with a white-tile bath and shower. He began peeling off his clothing at the sight of it.

The needle spray brought him back from a stupor of exhaustion. He increased the pressure and let the water massage strength back into his body. He luxuriated in the warmth until his eyes focused on the tile walls that enclosed him, and his stomach began to churn even before his mind remembered the white-tile room where Rusty waited. An emotional dam that had held for twenty-four hours began to crumble. It burst, finally, in a moan—a cry so deep and outraged it might have come from a forest animal trying to free itself from a cruel trap. *Big boys don't cry, Rusty. Big boys pick themselves up and go on.* But big men sob out their hearts when there's nothing else left to do.

After a long time, Wagner realized he was sitting on the floor of the shower while the spray beat down on his head. He struggled to his feet and turned off the water. Wrapping himself in a bath sheet, he stumbled into the bedroom. He was asleep by the time his head touched the pillow . . .

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A telephone was ringing. Wagner stirred awake and extricated one arm from the bath sheet. The house was dark except for a shaft of light coming from the bathroom and a digital clock on the night table blinked 8:05 as he picked up the instrument. It was Pamela Foster. She had talked with Sally and learned where to locate him. Could he come to her apartment? He certainly could. He scratched the address on the telephone pad and started looking for his clothes.

She lived in an area near the university where students could almost afford the rent on old stucco apartments and duplexes. She opened the door at Wagner's first knock.

"Hi," she said. "Come in. You look just like Rusty."

She was shoulder high to Wagner, with hazel eyes and short auburn hair. She wore canvas shoes, tight bluejeans, and an oversized sweater that had belonged to Rusty. She beckoned him into a small living room cluttered with newspapers and lighted only by a small color TV with the audio turned off.

"I made fresh coffee," she announced. "Do you mind drinking it in the kitchen? It's not so messy there."

"The kitchen's the best room in the house," Wagner said.

She smiled briefly. "That's what Rusty used to say. I baked a chocolate cake, too. It's from a mix, but it's pretty good. I just couldn't go back to class today, and I got tired of TV and all those newspapers. They don't even mention Rusty."

The cake was surprisingly good and so was the coffee. But Pamela ignored them both and began her story of the previous afternoon. Rusty was to have met her in the campus library at 2:00 P.M. When he hadn't appeared by 2:30, she tried to reach him by telephone and failed to get an answer. Fearing that he might be ill, she had driven to his residence. His car was in the driveway, but there was no response to the doorbell. It was then that she called the landlord from the front unit and they entered the apartment together. Rusty, dressed only in jockey shorts, was sprawled on the floor near his bed.

"Mr. Lopez tried to turn him over," she added, "and saw all the blood. He yelled, 'Don't touch anything!' so I ran back to his house and called the police."

The story was recited in a monotone that suggested much retelling. The police had come, followed shortly by a medical examiner who pronounced that rigor mortis was complete. Rusty had been dead for at least twelve hours.

Pamela pushed a lock of hair from her forehead and replenished

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Wagner's cup. "The lieutenant asked me a lot of questions. Was Rusty troubled about anything? Was he depressed when he left me Sunday night?"

"You were with Rusty Sunday night?"

She smiled in recollection. "Rusty bought tickets to a concert I wanted to hear. He must have paid a lot for them, because when he stopped to buy a pizza on the way home I had to loan him five dollars. We came back here to eat the pizza. I had only one can of beer in the fridge, so I gave it to Rusty. I drank apple juice."

"And that's all Rusty drank—one can of beer?"

"Right. He turned on TV and started to watch an old horror movie, but I had an early class on Monday and asked him to leave. It was after one-thirty then. He left a little later."

"Did he have a bruise on his cheek?" Wagner asked.

Pamela shook her head. "He might have had lipstick on his cheek—and he sure wasn't depressed. Is it important?"

"It might be. He has one now. The police are checking the campus for any possible enemies."

For the first time during the conversation Pamela appeared frightened. "I don't think they'll find anything," she reflected, "but I'll tell you before you hear it all wrong from somebody else."

It wasn't an easy story to relate. Pamela was a first-year student from a small town and a protective family, and her naivete had cost her dearly. Flattered by the attentions of a senior letterman, she accepted his invitation to a date which, it developed, included dinner, dancing, and rape.

"It's called 'date rape,' " she explained, "and it happens to more coeds than ever admit it. I learned that too late."

"Did you go to the police?" Wagner asked.

"What good would that do? The guys say it was a part of a regular relationship, and the police buy it. I couldn't even tell my parents. They would have taken me out of school, and I want an education! I bore down on the books and stopped dating."

"What about Rusty?"

"Well, one day my old VW wouldn't start in a campus parking lot, and Rusty came along and started it. He even followed me home in case my car conked out again. Later, when he kept asking for dates, I told him what had happened. He was furious."

"What did he do?"

"Nothing—I asked him not to. But one day a few months later we were walking on campus when Sid Kelsey—the senior—passed us,

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and Rusty remarked that sanitation should be more careful about keeping trash off the sidewalk. Kelsey yelled back, 'You should thank me, cowboy, for warming her up for you!' Rusty decked him. Knocked him out cold. Rusty said, 'He'll live,' and we walked on. That was the end of it."

"Are you sure?" Wagner persisted.

"It had to be. Kelsey graduated at mid-term. He moved to Albuquerque and probably doesn't even remember my name. I sure can't see him coming back to sneak in Rusty's back door and shoot him."

"Why the back door?"

"Because it was standing open when we found Rusty's body."

It was two cups of coffee later before Wagner could break away from the girl. She wanted to talk about Rusty, about the ranch, about anything that would ward off another lonely night, but he had his mind on an open back door that Pauley had neglected to mention. Mr. Lopez, Pamela had explained, said that sometimes the lock didn't catch. Possibly it hadn't caught tonight.

He remembered a short cut to Rusty's place through a small shopping center that was all but deserted at night, and approached down an alleyway to the carport. He parked beside Rusty's red Camaro that was ancient in years but pampered to perfection.

The unit was a small cottage secluded by shrubbery that would have muffled even a gunshot, and Wagner was eerily aware that he walked where a killer might have walked and reached for a doorknob a killer might have turned. But he hadn't touched the knob before he was suddenly impaled in the glare of a flashlight. Instinctively, he swung at whoever was behind the light and hit solid flesh. The light fell to the ground and focused on Sergeant Deaver sprawled on the grass. He wasn't in uniform, but one hand was reaching for a gun.

Since the gun wasn't yet in the sergeant's hand, Wagner grasped it and helped the policeman to his feet.

"What are you doing here?" Deaver demanded.

"I could ask you the same question."

"I followed you. I was in the shopping center when you drove through. Don't you know this place is officially sealed?" Deaver retrieved his flashlight from the ground and focused it on the door. It was padlocked and posted with a police-department warning. "When Lieutenant Pauley gives the word, you can get inside. Right now, Mr. Wagner, you can get off this property or face arrest."

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"My son died in that building," Wagner protested.

It was a waste of breath. The sergeant wasn't going to leave until he did. So Wagner returned to his truck and headed back toward Sally's house. Deaver's headlights in the rearview mirror kept him company for several blocks. It was almost like being run out of town.

Sally was entitled to sleep late in the morning, but Wagner had business downtown. He located a mortician and arranged for a simple casket and no chapel service. Rusty would be buried in the mountains in a grave next to Martha's. Because the body could not be picked up until the medical examiner and the district attorney signed a release, Wagner returned to the morgue with instructions of where he could be reached when ready.

The morgue attendant remembered him. "About that bruise on your son's left cheek," he advised, "minute particles of red dust or sand were embedded in the flesh. He might have fallen or scraped against a brick wall."

"Could it have been caused by a blow?"

"Oh, no. It was a slight abrasion no way connected to the cause of death. Tests for drugs and alcohol were negative, too."

Wagner had one more question. "Has anyone other than Pauley and myself come to view the body?" he asked.

The attendant shook his head. "They don't, Mr. Wagner. People just don't come to a morgue unless it's required."

Pauley wasn't in his office. One of the staff directed Wagner to a pistol range, where he found the lieutenant observing qualifying tests. "Glad to see you!" Pauley shouted above the noise. "You can probably take your son home tomorrow!"

"And will that be the end of it?" Wagner asked.

They moved back a few feet to a quieter spot. "As long as there's any doubt, our files remain open on a case," Pauley answered. "We haven't been sitting on our hands, Mr. Wagner. I can tell you, to begin with, that your son had no academic problems."

"I know that," Wagner said.

"His medical record shows no illness that could cause a suicidal depression—"

"I know that, too."

"—and the only campus trouble we found concerns a former student who had insulted Pamela Foster. That individual has since married the daughter of a New Mexico state senator and is honeymooning in Hawaii."

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"So you can scratch Kelsey."

"Right. There's still the landlord, Lopez, who had access to the apartment, but he was in bed with his wife and has no motivation for murder. That leaves only Pamela Foster. —You look shocked, Mr. Wagner. But she could have had motivation. A lovers' quarrel. Insecurity. A bad experience with one man could have made her overly dependent on your son. He might not have wanted a commitment and she was afraid of losing him."

"That's pretty far-fetched," Wagner protested.

Pauley shook his head. "Nothing is too far-fetched in my profession. If I haven't seen it all already, I probably will tomorrow. Miss Foster says she didn't have a key to your son's apartment, but I'm sure he would have let her in at any hour. But, putting aside speculation, if it is a murder then it's more than likely that some crazed addict was trying to get money for another fix. The danger in a citizen having a gun for protection is that the criminal is on the offensive and gets to it first."

The lieutenant turned his attention back to the firing range and let Wagner absorb what he had said. "Why didn't you tell me the back door was open when Rusty's body was found?" Wagner challenged.

Without turning around, Pauley answered, "Didn't I? I have a lot of things on my mind. This morning I had to send Deaver on a trip to the desert to ID an abandoned sedan found by the Highway Patrol. The inside was clean, but there's a clear handprint on the left front fender where Officer Torres tried to catch himself and enough cocaine traces in the trunk to make it clear why he was shot. The sedan was stolen and the gun we have is untraceable. Frustrating, isn't it?" He looked back at Wagner appraisingly. "You come on strong," he reflected, "and I know why. After you left my office yesterday, I remembered Red Wagner. You were big time on the rodeo circuit for years."

"Anything wrong with that?"

"Temperament. Anyone with star quality usually has a low boiling point. Come with me, Wagner."

They walked together to a vacated pistol range. The lieutenant took his service revolver from the holster and checked the chambers. He handed the gun to Wagner.

"Go ahead," he said. "Give it a try."

Wagner weighed the weapon in his hands. He took careful aim and fired once. The shot was far off center.

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"Red Wagner can do better than that," Pauley chided. "Think of that target as a murderer—a murderer who killed your son."

Wagner tensed as all his faculties came to bear on the target. He aimed and fired in rapid succession—each shot a bull's-eye. He kept on pressing the trigger on an empty gun until the lieutenant wrested it from his grip. "That's better," he said. "Take out your frustration on the target. Don't play private eye and knock my officers around."

Wagner started to protest that he hadn't meant to strike the sergeant, but now Pauley was smiling. "Come upstairs to my office," he said, "and I'll see if the lab work is finished so you can get inside that unit legally."

When Pauley relinquished the key to Rusty's lodging, he brought two plastic bags to his desk. One held a revolver that Wagner quickly identified. "I can't give you the gun," Pauley said, "it's evidence. I can give you these other items found on the body or taken from the premises, but you'll have to sign for them."

The gold ring was a high-school class ring, the gold watch a graduation gift. The leather wallet was opened to check the contents: a driver's license, social-security card, bank card, two twenty-dollar bills, and two photos that caught Wagner by surprise. One, a faded snapshot, was of Martha and himself. The other was a recent school photo of fourteen-year-old Scotty.

"Nice-looking family," Pauley remarked.

It was that, but now young Scotty was all Wagner had left.

It was necessary to pick up a suit of clothes for delivery to the mortician. Wagner telephoned Sally to explain his whereabouts and she insisted on meeting him at the cottage. "You need moral support," she said.

"Joe's peyote-chewing cousin might come in handy, too," he told her.

He was glad to have company. All of the shades were drawn when they entered the cottage, and turning on the lights made visible the dark stain on the carpet where Rusty's life had bled away. It was a spartan environment: one large room containing a bed, a dresser, an overcrowded bookcase, a chair, and the essential stereo and TV. A narrow hall dividing kitchen and bath led to the rear door. Wagner walked back to test the lock. He opened the door and stared out toward the carport.

"What are you looking for?" Sally asked.

"Something that has to be here but I don't see it," he said.

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"Well, that's better than something that isn't here and you can see it."

"There's no brick out here," Wagner concluded and closed the door. Sally had found the closet and removed a cloth suitcase. She asked why he was interested in brick and he explained.

"There are brick buildings on campus," she remarked, "but don't ask me what Rusty would be doing there after one-thirty in the morning. —Didn't he own anything but jeans? Oh, here's a white shirt with lipstick on it."

They both knew whose lipstick it was. "How well do you know Pamela Foster?" Wagner asked.

"Well enough to know she was terrified when Rusty brought her to me. She was afraid that campus coyote had made her pregnant. I took her to my gynecologist. Luckily, it wasn't so."

"Drugs, rape, suicide—it's so damned unfair," Wagner said. "We send our kids to a university so they can have a better life, and we send them into a jungle. I know Pauley thinks Rusty shot himself, and I can't live with that! I can't believe my son could be so troubled he couldn't turn to his own father—"

When his voice broke, Sally touched his arm. "You worry me, Red. I'm coming up to the ranch to stay a while later on."

It was a question more than a statement, and Wagner answered. "I'd like that—later on."

"Good. Now let's try to find a suit to go with this shirt."

Rusty owned one suit—navy-blue, coat, vest, and trousers. Sally searched the trouser pockets before folding it and found seventeen cents. The coat pockets yielded two ticket stubs for a rock concert and a statement from an automatic bank-teller transaction. "At the price of these tickets," she remarked, "it's no wonder Rusty needed a forty-dollar withdrawal."

It took a few seconds for the import of her words to register. "Let me see that statement," Wagner demanded.

He had been given a billfold containing two twenty-dollar bills, and it had taken all this time to recall that Rusty had had no cash for a pizza after the concert. The statement was specific as to the amount, the location of the bank, the date, and the exact time of withdrawal. When Wagner had absorbed all of this information, he asked Sally to take the clothing to the mortician because something else demanded his immediate attention.

The bank was where it had to be—in the shopping center Rusty

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used as a short cut. In the daytime it was crowded, but the bank stood apart from the other structures and its parking lot was reached by a one-way lane with tire shredders to insure the traffic flow.

Wagner parked and walked to the automatic-teller window where Rusty had made his last transaction on Monday at 1:59 A.M. The window was shaded from the desert sun by a low overhanging roof. By night it would have been lighted, but there would be no other lights anywhere except from widely spaced streetlamps. It was unlikely that Rusty would have noticed a sedan and a police car parked thirty feet away, but he would have reacted to the shooting.

Wagner examined the wall of the bank: white stucco. The walk was cement, the paving asphalt. There was no brick to fall against in fright. He looked up at the roof. Above a wooden supporting beam, the construction was red tile, and one of the tiles was chipped. Stretching as far as he could, he managed to pick off a fragment of the tile and wrap it in his handkerchief. He then ran an exploratory hand along the beam until he touched metal. A pocket knife removed the bullet.

The bullet bounced on Pauley's desk and spun to a stop. "Send this to ballistics," Wagner said. "I'll bet my ranch it came from the same gun that killed Torres." Then, carefully, he unfolded the handkerchief to display the fragment of tile. "This can go to the medical examiner for a match with the particles found in my son's cheek."

"Where did you get these?" Pauley demanded.

"Playing private eye at this address." Wagner placed the bank statement in the lieutenant's hand. He was a smart man: he could read the place and the date and the time. He could follow the logic laid out to him.

"My son was standing at this automatic-teller window when a shot was fired that hit the roof above and sprayed shattered tile into his cheek. What would you do if you were caught in the line of fire?"

"Run for cover," Pauley answered.

"Right. For Rusty, the nearest cover was his car, but the only way home was to drive through the scene of the shooting. He saw the killer and the killer saw him—that's why my son was murdered. Lieutenant, we're looking for the same man."

For a man who had seen everything, the lieutenant still looked surprised. "Do you think a drug dealer fleeing for his life would take the time to follow your son and kill him?" he challenged.

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"It's possible," Wagner conceded, "but that's not exactly what I said."

When Sergeant Deaver reported back from his trip to the desert, he found Wagner still in the lieutenant's office and Pauley frowning over some paperwork. "Sergeant," he said, "something's missing from your report on Torres' death. There's no description of the killer."

"With all the fast action," Deaver explained, "I didn't notice much. And he's long gone, Lieutenant."

"Not necessarily. A car abandoned out of the city doesn't mean the man is gone. He could be anywhere—even in that shopping center where you spotted Wagner last night. What were you doing there at that hour? Meeting someone?"

The sergeant tensed. He reminded Wagner of a wild deer catching the scent of danger.

"No, sir," he said tightly, "I needed cigarettes. Look, about the killer—I can look through the mug shots."

Pauley shook his head. "I doubt that would be productive. Another thing omitted from your report is any mention of a third car parked outside the bank."

"I pulled into the lot from the street," Deaver explained. "If another car was parked farther back, I couldn't have seen it."

"But you must have seen the man at the lighted teller window."

"I didn't look in that direction."

"Not even when you took a shot at him?"

That wild deer would have been long gone, but Deaver seemed rooted to the floor. "I didn't shoot—" he began.

"You didn't shoot at the fleeing sedan, obviously," Pauley interrupted. "Only two shots were fired from the gun you sent to ballistics. The first killed Officer Torres and the other landed in a beam of the bank roof a few inches from the teller window. The man at that window was Mr. Wagner's son."

"No!" Deaver shouted. "I saw no one at that bank!"

Wagner moved closer to the desk. "I sure hate to call a man a liar," he said, "but you weren't with the officers who found my son's body, Sergeant, and you never saw him at the morgue—so how could you agree with the lieutenant yesterday morning on the strong family resemblance if you hadn't seen my son?"

The ringing telephone on the desk silenced any answer. Pauley

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took the call, listened, thanked the caller, and put down the phone. He seemed older when he looked at Deaver again.

"You shot Torres, didn't you?" he said quietly. "It doesn't make sense any other way. Rusty Wagner had to be silenced because what he witnessed wasn't a drug dealer shooting a police officer—it was one police officer shooting another. When did you learn Torres was an investigator for internal affairs? And when did he learn that you were the contact the dealer was waiting to meet?"

"You can't prove a thing!" Deaver shouted.

"I won't have to. You'll be so busy plea-bargaining with the D.A. we won't have to do anything but turn on the recorder. That telephone call confirmed that an inquiry was made at two-ten on Monday morning for an ID on the license plates on Rusty Wagner's car. You had all the time you needed to eliminate the only witness to the shooting and feel confident it would pass for just another teenage suicide. As for Torres, he was the victim of an unidentified drug dealer who supplied you with an unidentifiable gun."

Pauley shoved back his chair and stood up. "Sergeant Deaver," he ordered, "place your badge and your gun on my desk."

The lieutenant was looking into Deaver's eyes, but Wagner watched his hand. The gun came out of the holster but not butt-end first. Wagner smashed the sergeant's wrist against the desktop and caught the weapon as Deaver fled the office. "Don't shoot!" Pauley roared, but Wagner was already racing off in pursuit.

Deaver had a head start but needed wheels for a getaway. Wagner caught up with him in the parking lot. Shoving the gun under his belt, he dove onto the hood of the moving vehicle Deaver had commandeered and grabbed the wiper well with both hands. It wasn't all that different from bulldogging a steer. They sped toward the street just as a mortician's van nosed into the driveway. Deaver spun the wheel and executed a turn wide enough for Wagner to leap clear seconds before the vacated hood pleated itself into a cement wall.

Deaver crawled from the car and twisted about to face a man who now held a gun in his hand. "I didn't want to kill your son," he cried. "I went to see if he recognized me. He reached for his gun—"

From a distance, Pauley still shouted, "Don't shoot!" but something he'd said earlier rang in Wagner's mind "—*a murderer who killed your son.*"

When he pulled the trigger, a shower of broken glass spewed out from a window above Deaver's head. By that time, Pauley had

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panted his way to the scene and stared in disbelief. "*You* couldn't miss!" he gasped.

Wagner handed the gun to the lieutenant butt-end first. "Only if I try," he said. "Take your prisoner. I'm sick of the sight of him."

On the following morning, Wagner drove to the mortuary and helped load Rusty's casket in the back of the pickup. The sky was overcast and the weather would worsen along the way, but a waterproof tarp protected the precious cargo.

When all was secure, he got into the truck and headed north. He had come down from the mountains seeking vengeance, but vengeance could bring no peace. The only comfort to be had was the knowledge that Rusty was clean. No drugs, no senseless suicide. He had come to the jungle and remained a man, and that was how he was going home.

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THE JURY BOX
by ALLEN J. HUBIN

Some mystery authors have had extraordinarily long writing careers, remaining active into their eighties, even nineties. Lee Thayer comes to mind: she published her last novel at age ninety-two. And prolific Britisher Eden Phillpotts wrote well into his nineties, dying at age ninety-eight and issuing several mysteries in that decade of his life. Others, like Christie and Gardner and Stout, published in their eighties, and still others, like Mignon G. Eberhart and Phyllis A. Whitney, remain active as octogenarians.

Joining that circle this year is England's E. X. Ferrars, whose first mystery appeared in 1940 and whose fifty-ninth, *The Other Devil's Name* (Doubleday, $12.95), is now before me. Ferrars has come back to series characters after many years without them, and this continues the adventures of Andrew Basnett, retired professor of biology. He's asked for help by an old friend, Constance Camm. It seems Camm's sister has received an anonymous and apparently errant blackmail letter referring to the burying of bodies. And while the Maddingleigh police have no active homicide cases, it is true that several folks thereabouts have disappeared of late. So Andrew goes, with some reluctance, to the Camms' village. This is a polished, enjoyable tale; Ferrars continues to be an adroit storyteller.

Margaret Millar's *Spider Webs* (Morrow, $16.95) is quite an accomplishment, a remarkable portrayal of an alleged muderer caught in the toils of justice, surrounded by leeches. Cully King, a black man and native of St. John in the Caribbean, is said to have taken a married white woman aboard the yacht he captained, gone to sea, and returned without her. Trial is underway in San Diego. Millar brilliantly paints the cast, deftly catching tones of strength and weakness: the defendant, the D.A., the defense attorney, the judge, the court clerk, the dead woman's husband, witnesses, family members. This will be one of the high points of your reading year.

G. D. H. Pringle is a retired tax inspector who finds himself amid murder. He does so again in Nancy Livingston's *Fatality at Bath & Wells* (St. Martin's, $14.95). The setting is a new TV studio in Bath, just opening with great hoopla for its first broadcast, with a Royal Personage in attendance. The program director is a well connected incompetent, and the broadcast consequently appears headed for a spectacular disaster. A corpse is provided just in time to take the disaster to heights heretofore found only in TV-industry nightmares,

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and Mr. Pringle—on hand for an interview on new tax laws—is asked to help prove that the obvious suspect didn't do it. An amusing devastation of the television business.

Jo Bannister's *Mosaic* (Doubleday, $12.95) is a notably gripping and evocative tale of South Africa and the long and deadly arm of its intolerances. And it is not a simple-minded approach to complexity, but a well rounded account of people caught in events in part outside their control. The head of South African Intelligence is dying. His second-in-command sends Vanderbilt, South Africa's most effective agent, to England where resides in sanctuary Joel Grant, who emerged a ravaged shell from South African torture chambers. Vanderbilt's assignment is to extract Grant from England, despite police and despite South African refugees and—most important—despite Grant himself, and return him intact to South Africa. The reason why Grant is wanted gradually becomes clear, and we learn about the reserves of courage, strength, and determination in people on both sides of the bloody struggle. In the midst of terror and death and political expedience, hope and justice may even be found.

Even more convoluted than normal are the schemes of Lovejoy in his eleventh novel, *Moonspender*, by Jonathan Gash (St. Martin's, $14.95). He is having his usual scheduling difficulties with all the passionate females around. But, in addition, a nasty gangster wants him for duties not clearly specified; his assistance with the opening of a new restaurant goes awry; he's fending off the offer of an estate-manager job, tendered for reasons suspect; a moneyed gentleman demands Lovejoy find for him the antique bronzes said to be around somewhere. And much more. Each day a handful of fresh summonses turns up at Lovejoy's triple-mortgaged hovel as the fruit of these misadventures. And one of these matters—apparently the bronzes—starts producing corpses. One of the best of one of the most imaginative series around, with all the convolutions wondrously resolved.

The occasion for annual joy has arrived: the new Dick Francis novel, *Bolt* (Putnam, $17.95). And if I found in this a bit less of the compelling Francis magic than in the last *(Break In)*, I still took much pleasure in it. Kit Fielding, who first appeared in *Break In*, returns here. He's engaged to Danielle de Brescou, American and offspring of a wealthy French family, and he's terrified that he's losing her. Her aunt, Casilia, owns horses which Kit rides. Her uncle, Roland de Brescou, paralyzed with disease, is part owner of a prestigious French company whose other owner wants to start manufacturing plastic handguns. Roland says no, but Henri Nanterre, who is three-parts thug, won't accept that answer and goes looking for leverage. Anywhere. Meanwhile, Fielding still hasn't escaped his own ancestral feud: Maynard Allardeck, racing

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steward and self-made business tycoon, hates Fielding with a psychopathic passion. Out of this mix, as you can imagine, Francis brings an absorbing narrative.

Murder in the Wings (St. Martin's, $15.95) by Edward Gorman is an encore for Jack Dwyer, former cop turned actor and security guard and sometimes sleuth. The setting is Chicago, which plays no role. But the Bridges Theater does. Here, a motley crew, including Dwyer, is presenting an O'Neill drama. The director, a poisonous chap, is murdered. The evident suspect is Stephen Wade, who has fallen from a distinguished acting career into a slough of alcohol. But the owners of the theater seem also to be playing roles: the feared matriarch; her daughter, prone to dementia; her despised son-in-law; her magnificently beautiful granddaughter. While the police hunt Wade, Dwyer pokes about among actors and owners and their tangled affairs, finding, on one long and rainy weekend, more death, hidden relationships, and a killer. Well done.

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ABOUT OUR COVERS

We've been receiving enough reader mail and verbal comment about our present line of covers to think you may want to know how they came about—and then perhaps tell us those you've especially liked so far, and even make suggestions about celebrities you'd like to see on future covers (whether they would be willing or able to comply will be up to us to find out) and/or suggest scenario ideas (the cover model as victim, perpetrator, witness—or someone in spooky circumstances).

If we use an idea of yours, we will notify you in advance and sign you up for a complimentary subscription to *EQMM*. If more than one reader suggests a scenario or celebrity we choose, each one will receive a subscription—providing the suggestion arrives at our office before that idea is already in production.

We're sorry we don't have the staff to answer mail received in answer to this proposal, except for notification of subscription winners, but you can be sure that all replies will be appreciated. They should be sent to:

The Editors
Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine
380 Lexington Avenue
New York, NY 10017

Be sure to include your name and address in your letter. If you would like to be reassured that we have received your suggestion, enclose a stamped, self-addressed postcard.

On the February 1986 cover of *EQMM*, we featured actor Larkin Malloy reflected in a mirror wearing a tuxedo and carrying a gun. The response was so favorable that art director Gerry Hawkins, who as a friend of Mr. Malloy had asked him to pose for the cover, suggested we continue with a line of covers featuring celebrities, contributing writers, and other friends of the magazine. And so, starting with the April 1986 issue and continuing to date, our cover models have been:

April 1986: Eddie Lawrence*
May 1986: Mary Frisque**
June 1986: Carleton Carpenter**

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July 1986: Kim Sykes**
August 1986: George Baxt**
September 1986: Howard McGillin, Joe Grifasi, John Herrera, George N. Martin, Patti Cohenour, and Jana Schneider from the cast of *Drood* (photo © Martha Swope)
October 1986: Joel Davis and Veena Raghavan**
November 1986: Carol Brener and Jean Weiss**
December 1986: Loretta Swit**
Mid-December 1986: James Powell**
January 1987: Norman George of *Poe . . . Alone***
February 1987: Judith Crist and Cynthia Manson**
March 1987: Robert Barnard**
April 1987: Thomas Adcock*
May 1987: Roseanne Barr*
June 1987: Paul Dooley*
July 1987: Isaac Asimov*
August 1987: Steve Allen*
September 1987: Tai Ellin Brown*

Scheduled for October: Clark Howard

—The Editors

*Photograph by John Raffo
**Photograph by Roy Schneider

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a ***NEW*** short story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

Lazarus wandered in the overgrown garden and told himself he'd have to cut the grass. There was an ancient gravestone lying flat on the ground near the hedge dividing this property from Angeles Hagen's garden. Cyrus Bladen, 1702–1759. The stone was discovered in England by the owner of the house when he was in Sussex, tracing his roots. A number of headstones had been rescued from a graveyard before it collapsed into the sea. Since Cyrus was his ancestor, the current Bladen was allowed to transport the stone back to Canada . . .

WHERE THE BODIES ARE BURIED

by WILLIAM BANKIER

They brought Caz Lazarus all the way from Montreal and set him up in a comfortable house in Baytown. They gave him a wife—Molly. She was a good cop, too.

Caz and Molly slept in separate rooms. But they behaved as husband and wife where they could be observed by Angeles Hagen, who lived next door. The big blonde spent a lot of time working out in her garden, wearing skimpy shorts and tank-top. Angeles surely knew where her brother Mike was hiding. And Mike Hagen was the possessor of information beyond price to the Montreal police.

"I'm going, honey!" Molly called from the driveway where she was about to get into her car.

Lazarus stopped typing gibberish on the electric and put his head out of the study window. "You take care," he called down to her.

Molly blew him a kiss and touched her curls in a mock salute.

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This was her day to die. She climbed into the car, switched on, and drove away. In the garden next door, Angeles Hagen shifted her heavyhand weights and altered the tempo of her jogging. Lazarus thought she looked like one of the blockbuster skaters in a television roller derby. He put his head back inside and, moments later, the typewriter came to life.

Angeles stopped exercising. She put down the weights and stood looking up at the open window of her neighbor's house. She licked beads of perspiration from her upper lip. The day he arrived, Lazarus had given her an interested glance which registered on her radar. Maybe he and the cute wife, with all their public demonstrations of affection, were not really getting along. Angeles sensed something out of place over there.

Molly's accident was staged on a county road with the Provincials handling it instead of the Baytown Police. She ran her car off the road into a tree. An ambulance was standing by. The "body" was removed, the wreck was towed, Lazarus was notified. He left the house in a hurry, spoke to the authorities, and arranged for Molly to be shipped to her parental home in Toronto. After ten days' furlough, she would be back on duty in the big city.

Under the pretense of attending the funeral, Hagen drove to Montreal and reported to his superiors. So far, so good. He was established as a freelance writer living in the house in Baytown. His neighbor, Angeles Hagen, had seemed interested from day one. Now, as a widower, he was eligible to be comforted and entertained.

"Don't rush it, Caz," the Captain said. "Don't lose her. The election is still eleven months away."

Another officer said, "But we need time to go and get Hagen wherever he's run to. We have to persuade him to come back and testify."

"Which won't be easy, but it's essential." The Captain was a dreamer. He saw Montreal with St. Denis out as Mayor, the whole corrupt regime swept away. He saw Rachotte in position with his reform administration. He saw himself as Chief. "Mike Hagen knows where the bodies are buried. His testimony can blow the whistle." He cleared his throat. "We need Hagen."

"I can't press too hard," Lazarus said. "She's a mysterious woman. I get the feeling she's not entirely of this world."

"She's always been a little spacey. She drinks every day. She flies

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to Vegas. She gambles and she parties. There's usually a man but never the same one."

Lazarus drove back to Baytown. He opened the windows in the musty house and went about his life as a widower. He wandered in the overgrown garden and told himself he'd have to cut the grass. There was an ancient gravestone lying flat on the ground near the hedge dividing this property from Angeles Hagen's garden. Cyrus Bladen, 1702–1759. Caz and Molly had been given the story by the agent when they were looking the place over. The stone was discovered in England by the owner of the house, who was a descendent of the Eighteenth Century Bladen. He was in Sussex, tracing his roots. A number of headstones had been rescued from a graveyard before it collapsed into the sea. Now they were propped against the church wall. Since Cyrus was his ancestor, the current Bladen was allowed to transport the stone back to Canada.

"It's spooky," Molly said.

Lazarus had a different feeling about it. "Some things are worth preserving."

Now, as he pretended to mourn Molly, the real pain came crashing back and hit him in the stomach so hard he gasped for breath. Six years ago, when Norma died, he had promised himself he would never put himself in a vulnerable position again. No more commitment to a woman. No more love, because love is the flip-side of agony. Now here he was, pretending to grieve over the loss of Molly, who was alive and well. Yet his face in the bathroom mirror was grey, the eyes blasted.

He was the right man for the job. Maybe Angeles Hagen would be impressed.

She came up close to the divider hedge for the first time. Lazarus was sitting in a wicker chair with a notebook on his knee. She gave him a lopsided smile. "Not much fun, is it?"

"No, it isn't."

"I know the feeling. Losing a loved one."

"You never get over it."

"Only when you die yourself."

"But life won't let you do that."

"Not so far," she said.

He pretended to write a line. If she ever looked at his pages of scrawl, she'd know what a fraud he was.

"Am I disturbing your work?"

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"I'm through for today."

"Want to come and have a drink? It'll get you out of the house." She grinned. Her teeth were as healthy as the rest of her. "Even if it's only next door."

He changed into a dark suit and white shirt and tie, as if the invitation were to a formal event. His instinct proved correct. When he got there, she was in a gown that displayed her beautifully shaped arms and shoulders. Her broad face, the high cheekbones, radiated the effects of just enough sun. The thick honey hair was brushed away from her forehead and down her back in a heavy fall.

"Martinis okay?" The frosty pitcher contained sufficient for the entire Police Benevolent Association with some left over for the bar staff.

"Definitely okay."

He took his drink to a settee near the fire. Baytown was experiencing a funny summer—hot days followed by clear, cool nights. Angeles came and sat beside him. "Do you feel like talking about it?"

Could he talk about Norma, referring to her as Molly, without coming apart and giving the game away? "Not yet," he said.

"Whenever you're ready." She drank as if she liked it, letting silence fill the room. The only sound was the snap of maple going up in flames.

She said, "I could put on some music, but I remember how music used to tear me up when Pietro died."

"You're right. Music is a killer." There was a question he was supposed to ask. "Pietro?"

"Pietro Main. He worked at the Club Carousel in Montreal. Have you ever been to Montreal?"

"Never," Lazarus lied.

"I'm the sister of a famous brother. Mike Hagen used to do a late-night music and interview program from the Carousel. He was an important man."

"You say was. Is your brother dead?"

"He disappeared. Nobody knows where he is. Anyway, this is about Pietro." Angeles refilled the glasses. "Pietro was a waiter in the lounge where Mike did his show. I met him when I came down to Montreal for a visit. This was a few years ago. I didn't look like I do now."

"What did you look like?"

"Fat. Plain. But Pietro liked what he saw. He approached me the

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first time I came to the club. He was a beautiful man. He looked like a movie star."

"What happened?"

"Nothing, that visit. But Pietro kept in touch. He telephoned a lot. He wrote me letters. That was all I needed. I started exercising and watching what I ate. I ran off thirty pounds fast. I drove back to Montreal and I got together with Pietro."

"Sounds good."

"My life opened up." She was drinking now from habit. "But Mike hated Pietro. And Pietro hated Mike. Part of the affair was Pietro getting at my brother. I have no illusions. That's the way it started."

"I'm not with you."

"Everybody around the Carousel kissed Mike Hagen's boots. He was the big star. All the staff worshipped him. Even the bosses, the mafiosi, they treated him with respect. He came to their weddings, he mentioned them on the air."

"But not Pietro."

"Pietro laughed at him. He imitated the way Mike walked. It was funny, but Mike couldn't stand it. Mike tried to get him fired but he was somebody's cousin."

"So what happened?"

Angeles got up and left the room, moving with the risky elegance of the habitual drinker. She came back with a photograph in a silver frame. "This is us on Ste. Catherine Street." It was a snapshot taken by a street photographer. Angeles was on the arm of a dark-haired man, the two of them radiant.

"I see what you mean."

"Mike saw it happening and he turned ugly. Pietro used it against him. That was wrong. But it was Pietro."

"What did he do?"

"He taunted Mike. He said we were going to make lots of babies and Mike would be their uncle. And he and Mike were going to be family. I saw something in my brother's eyes when Pietro said that about family."

"Not clever of Pietro. Mike has power."

"Yes, he did. And he used it."

"How?"

"He had Pietro killed. It looked like a mugging. He was stabbed and robbed in an alley on his way home from work."

"Can you pin a thing like that on your brother?"

"I'm not over it yet."

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Lazarus took her out to dinner when it looked as if any more drink would put her to sleep.

They drove north of town along country roads to a place she knew on the edge of a lake in a cedar forest. The cars in the parking lot were all Mercedes and up. Here is this hick town, the Montreal cop told himself, that everybody sneers at if they've even heard of it. But it's the locals who are laughing. They own this corner of paradise and they don't even have to fight to keep it.

The place was so square, people danced to a trio of accordion, bass, and drums. It was music from the Forties, schmaltzy and complacent. Lazarus led Angeles onto the floor and held her, catching glimpses of their reflection in french doors with silvery moonlight on the lake outside. She relaxed in his arms, let herself go soft. But he could sense the latent power in her body.

He had to call it off because she excited him too much. His "wife" had died only days ago. He was supposed to be in mourning, not falling in love. In the car, he said, "I'm writing a magazine article." This was a new idea, cleared with the brass when he visited Montreal.

"I thought you wrote fiction."

"I write what I can sell. This piece could be a winner. It's about something everybody is interested in."

She was falling asleep. "Whatsat?"

"Missing people."

"Mmmmm."

No need to press it. The subject was on the agenda now. When he received the dummy newspaper-clipping from Montreal, he would choose his time and spring it on her again. It might get her to open up about brother Mike and where he was hiding.

Bladen, the owner of the house, showed up one afternoon to collect a tennis racket. Lazarus believed the man was checking on the condition of his property. He turned out to be a decent individual who praised his tenant for taking good care of the garden. They sat outside drinking lemonade while Bladen talked about his illustrious ancestor whose monument made it awkward for Lazarus to operate the lawn mower.

Lazarus was curious. "If the cemetery hadn't eroded into the English Channel, if the stone had been in position with the remains under it, would you have moved it anyway?"

"Never. The inscription says, 'Here lies Cyrus Bladen—' which

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was no longer the case. So I decided the stone might as well be over here. Does it bother you?"

The sound of disco music issued from an open doorway of the other house. Angeles Hagen could be seen performing aerobic movements to the beat. "Nothing bothers me any more," Lazarus said while Bladen smiled and looked away.

The envelope from Montreal arrived in the mail next morning. Lazarus was pleased with what they had done for him. The text he had supplied was typeset in a single column under a headline in bold type. The piece had been cut out carelessly and then photocopied with the copy itself folded and handled until it looked a few months old. Placing the fake clipping in his wallet, Lazarus made up his mind to let Angeles see it at the first opportunity.

There was no suitable time for days. They called him from Montreal to ask about progress. The Captain came on the line to say, "We hear St. Denis may try to hold a snap election. The sooner you can find Hagen and bring him back to testify, the better."

"What am I supposed to do, beat it out of her?"

"If all else fails."

Nothing else was working. Angeles didn't talk in her sleep—on either of the nights Lazarus stayed with her. But she did open up a subject, finally, that could prove useful. It was everybody's favorite—money. And it came to the fore on an evening when Lazarus was feeding her at his house, serving his famous garlic spareribs on a bed of rice with plenty of beer in frosty glasses.

"Not any more," she said in response to a leading question. "I used to gamble. I used to spend ten days in Vegas. After Pietro died, I ran around quite a lot."

He kept an innocent face.

"I can't afford it these days. Mike used to stake me to a trip once a year. But now he's disappeared."

"Didn't he have the kindness and forethought to leave you some cash?"

"Bastard took it all with him."

"That makes two of us would like to talk to him."

"Come again?"

"The article I'm writing. About famous missing people." It felt like a night for fishing. Lazarus decided to bait the water. He excused himself, wandered down the hall, went into the study, and cleared his typewriter of work in progress. Then he took the phony clipping

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from his wallet and tucked it into the roller so that it stood out alone on the big machine.

Later, seated in the garden with a carafe of coffee on the paraffin burner and the brandy bottle resting in the grass, they watched the approach of storm clouds as the sun went down. "We may have to run for it," he said when thunder rumbled.

"Not yet," she said. "It's when the leaves blow inside out."

"Really?"

"Didn't you know that? Mike told me when we were kids. He knew things like that. When the leaves blow inside out, it means the rain is about to start."

"Can I use that in my article?"

"Use whatever you can find."

"I wish I could find Mike Hagen." On the spur of the moment, Lazarus decided to open up partway. "I've been writing some letters, researching my article. I've discovered Hagen had a reason to get out of Montreal."

"Did he?"

"Political. His job put him in touch with criminal types. Some of them had connections with St. Denis, the Mayor. A reform movement, led by a man named Rachotte, wants to get rid of St. Denis. Rachotte's people figure your brother can testify. They want to find him even more than I do."

"Good luck to them."

"All I want is to get this piece written." Lazarus was topping up their coffee, adding more brandy. "If you know where he went, it would help me a lot."

Thunder rolled closer. A fresh breeze brought the smell of distant fields into the garden. "Look," she said.

"What?"

"The leaves are blowing inside out."

They carried things into the house and, sure enough, by the time they were settled Lazarus had to run around closing windows to keep the rain from getting in. When he came back, he said, "You've never seen where I work."

"Show me."

He took her by the hand, led her down the hall and into the study. She hesitated in the doorway, as if she was about to enter a cathedral. "Where are your books?"

"I write articles for magazines and newspapers." He excused himself as the rain fell harder, saying there were windows to be closed

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upstairs. While he was up there, she appeared on the stairway. "I've seen where you work. Where do you sleep?"

They made love and afterward he wept and she held him, attributing his tears to Molly. But he was thinking of Norma. So much had happened to him since Norma died. Every now and then he experienced an hysterical urge to tell her things. When she was alive, nothing in Lazarus's life was official until Norma knew about it.

He was almost asleep when Angeles left the bed. He asked, "What's up?"

"I'm going home."

"Stay here."

"I sleep better in my own room. You aren't losing me."

"Is it Pietro?"

"What?"

"The picture by your bed."

"That's interesting. I never thought of that." She came back and kissed him goodbye. "I promise you, it isn't Pietro."

When she was gone and the front door closed after her, Lazarus wanted to satisfy his curiosity. Had she taken the bait?

He went downstairs in the dark. In his study, he closed the drapes, then switched on the desk lamp. Good. The clipping was still in the typewriter but rolled a different way. She had taken it out and read it.

Lazarus glanced at it again. The headline announced: "Missing Broadcaster Carried Fortune in Gems." The story explained: "If Michael Hagen, Montreal's vanished Man About Midnight, is now domiciled in South America, he is living high off the hog. Anonymous sources close to the radio interviewer say that Hagen recently converted his assets to diamonds. The negotiable, transportable gems were stashed in a belt worn next to Hagen's body at all times.

"Associate of gamblers and politicians, Hagen was an insider who knew too much. As such, he was always ready to fly. His landing, wherever it may have been, was obviously a happy one."

Angeles now had the message. Mike Hagen, when he passed through Baytown, was carrying considerable wealth. Tomorrow Lazarus would bring up the subject again and she would understand. Locating the man would be to their mutual benefit.

Back in bed, listening to the rain, Lazarus found it difficult to get to sleep. He was setting the woman up for a disappointment. Suppose

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she announced Michael had gone to Acapulco. Caz would set the wheels in motion, they would find him and persuade him to come home. Sooner or later, Angeles would ask Lazarus about the mythical diamonds.

He would have to blame it on journalists who tell lies to embellish a story.

The rain stopped. Was it the cessation of drumming on the bedroom window that woke Lazarus up? He lay in the dark, listening to the silence. Then he heard something else—the chink of metal against stone.

He got out of bed and went to the window. The storm was gone across the county, shreds of dark cloud racing past a bright full moon. Someone was moving at the far end of the garden—a hooded figure, pale against dark shrubbery, bent forward, lifted something heavy. As his night vision improved, Lazarus saw it was Angeles dressed in rainwear that covered her head. She had prized up the Bladen gravestone a few inches with a crowbar and now she was raising it and heaving it to one side. It landed on the grass with a thud that prompted her to turn and observe the house.

Lazarus moved away from the window. He dressed quickly, hurried downstairs, and went out through the back door, closing it without a sound. He didn't want her escaping in the dark, then denying she had ever been there. The air was cold and sweet-smelling, the grass was slick under his boots. A branch of honeysuckle soaked his face as he kept close to the hedge on his way to where Angeles was digging.

She raised her head when he approached across the lawn. The blade of the shovel was thrust deep in soft earth. "Good morning," he said.

"What are you doing up?"

"Same as you." There could be only one interpretation. "Looking for your brother Mike."

"He deserved it."

"Leave him."

"I read your clipping about the diamonds in the belt. I need the money."

"Come inside. Let me talk to you."

"I've started. If you can't stand it, go away."

"There are no diamonds. I planted that story to see what you'd do." He backed off a step, keeping his eyes on the way she was hefting the shovel. "Angeles, I'm a cop . . ."

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She told him how she came to kill her brother and Lazarus believed it must have been substantially that way. Hagen, knowing he would be subpoenaed to testify in the St. Denis hearing, fled Montreal. He stopped off in Baytown on his way out of the country, wanting Angeles to come with him, to serve as secretary/housemaid the way she used to do in the days pre-Pietro. She refused. He objected to her independence and tried to slap her around. She threw him against a wall, a shelf came down on his head, and he was knocked unconscious. She thought he might be dead.

"Your house was deserted then," she told Lazarus. "I dragged him over here, raised the headstone, dug a shallow grave, and put Mike in it. Then I covered him over and put the stone back in place."

"Were you drunk?"

"Out of my mind in those days. Half the time I thought Pietro was in the house."

The kitchen was cold, dawn still a couple of hours away. She sipped from the mug of cocoa Lazarus had given her. "Anyway, now you know what I did. And you're a cop."

"I have to think about it."

"I don't want to go to jail."

"Let me think."

If Hagen was dead, this particular game was over. The reform movement would have to come up with other witnesses. Hagen had been a diabolical character. Having arranged the death of his sister's lover, he deserved to be killed. Lazarus decided to see it this way. It gave him an excuse not to arrest the disturbed woman.

"I don't have to report this," he said. "If I'd slept better last night, I never would have seen you out there."

"Are you having trouble sleeping?"

"Some nights."

"What's the problem?"

"You are."

A week later, Lazarus was loading picnic provisions into the car for a day at the lake. He was relieved to be finished with the pretense of being a writer. Now he was just a cop on an open-ended assignment. The telephone rang and he went inside to answer it. It was Montreal calling, the Captain himself sounding cheerful. "Caz, it's all over. Mike Hagen showed up here this morning and says he's ready to testify."

"He showed up?"

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"He was in Mexico. I think his money ran out. You were on the right track. He says he spent a week with his sister before he headed south. She was drinking so much he says she may not remember he was there. They had a hell of a fight and she attacked him. He says he was lucky to get out alive."

Before the call ended, Lazarus said, "That furlough I've got coming. I think I'll take it now."

"We can't keep paying for the house."

"I've got another place to stay. See you in three months."

Angeles was in the passenger seat when he got behind the wheel. She was bright as a child on her way to the circus. He followed her directions getting out of town. Then he said, "You know how much I depend on you?"

"I know." She was holding his free hand and she kissed it.

"You need me the same way. I have to look after you."

"No argument."

"I told Montreal I'm not going back for a while. It's important you and I develop something really strong between us. So we can handle whatever may be coming."

"I feel strong around you."

"Good." He drove across an iron bridge and followed a road that curved up and through a succession of rolling hills. "So let's not go digging under any more gravestones."

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a ***NEW*** short story by

JOHN BENDEL

"Martin-from-the-roof," Ben shouted, "Martin-from-the-roof!" It was amazing how many new words he had learned, and how much he'd noticed.

A Woolrich-like tale of the dark fantastic by John Bendel, senior staff member at the National Lampoon, *where he has published humorous fiction. His essays have appeared in various publications, including* The New York Times *and* New Jersey Monthly . . .

GARDEN APARTMENT

by JOHN BENDEL

I'd do anything to keep Mother from finding out about me. But they're downstairs with her now—I can hear them talking. I know they'll be up here for me soon. I wish I could explain it to her.

See, I never meant any harm when I started playing up here in the attic six years ago when I was twelve. Mother always took good care of me, but there was this problem when my father left us that year. Mother had to take a job, which meant she couldn't bring me to school in the morning and pick me up in the afternoon like she always had before. You see, I didn't get along with the other kids. They picked on me.

After I was beat up a couple of times, the principal started dismissing me ahead of everyone else so I could get a head start for home. But some of the kids ran after me, and sometimes they gathered around the apartment and peered in the windows and shouted things through the mail slot. I climbed into the attic to get away from them.

When I began to spend a lot of time up here, Mother didn't like

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it, but she got used to it after a while. I brought up a lamp and my comics and GI Joes, and sat for hours in my little circle of light under the dark roof-joists, reading, playing, and imagining.

There's a brick fire-wall for each section of four garden apartments in the project where we live. Between the fire-walls, only chicken wire separates the attic above each unit. I worked the chicken wire loose in our section so I could squeeze underneath without bending it. I began playing in the attic because no one could get at me here. When I started going into the neighbors' apartments, it was for the thrill it gave me, like I was a secret agent or a Green Beret.

For little Ben, it was a good thing I did play up here. I was here one time when I heard him crying. He was only six months old then and he had been crying for more than an hour when I helped him. I lifted the hatch that opens in the ceiling of his upstairs hall and listened until I was sure his mother wasn't home. Then I let myself down and went to him in his crib. He was rolling around in his own vomit, wearing a dirty diaper. I couldn't leave him like that, so I cleaned out the crib, changed him, and calmed him down. I was afraid his mother would realize someone had been in the apartment, but she was always drunk, I don't think she noticed very much.

I listened for Ben after that. I even bought my own supply of Pampers, the same brand of diapers his mother used. If he needed a change, I would bring one in with me so she couldn't tell I'd been there.

Once I went downstairs to the refrigerator to get milk for his bottle. It was dirty and sticky and there were moldy leftovers sitting around. I wished I could take him out of there so he didn't have to grow up with her, but that wasn't possible, so I visited him whenever she left him alone and he'd smile when I came into his room. Even when he got big enough to climb out of his crib and say my name, I rocked him to sleep in my arms.

Once his mother came home when I was still in the apartment, but she was so clumsy trying to fit the key into the lock that I had time to put Ben in his crib and climb back into the attic. Her name is Silvia and she brings home drunks just like herself. They'd roll around and paw each other even when Ben was upstairs crying. There was nothing I could do for him then, and I hated that more than anything. Ben needed someone who wouldn't leave him all alone, and I tried to watch out for him. I wish there had been someone to watch out for me like that . . .

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See, I've got this ladder I use. I made it myself from clothesline and a hook from the hardware store. I hang it on a floor-joist in the attic and drop it into the open hatch. I don't need it to get down because I can hang and drop without making a sound. Except in the Greens' apartment. They have creaky floorboards in the hall under the hatch.

I went into the Greens' apartment first about two years ago. It's between my mother's apartment and the one where Agnes lived. The Greens both work, so they aren't home during the day. After I dropped out of school, I liked to play with their computer and read their magazines. Once, I stole his pornography collection from his bottom dresser drawer and the Greens argued about it. He accused her of throwing it out and she told him he was sick to need dirty pictures. He stormed out, but he came back in a few hours.

The pictures excited me at first, but then I realized the people in those photos were just like Ben's mother Silvia, so I burned them.

Anyhow, the real reason I need the rope ladder is to climb back into the attic. I can climb up and replace the hatch in less than thirty seconds. I've timed myself. But today nothing would have been fast enough. I didn't know Agnes was still at home when I went into her apartment.

Agnes's apartment is full of big old furniture with doilies on the arms and trays of African violets all over the place. She was a little grey-haired lady who hollered at kids if they looked at her wrong, but I liked her because once, a long time ago, she saved me from Frankie Gibbs. He had me in the hedges and was kicking me when she came out with a big wooden spoon in her hand. He took off when he saw her. Later, when I started visiting her apartment, she became very special to me. I'd never have hurt her on purpose—I just didn't know she was home. She should have been at work.

I listened before I dropped down from the attic, but I didn't hear anything. When I walked into her bedroom, she was lying in bed, looking right at me.

"Martin!" she shouted. Then she sat up in bed, looking at me as though I was a vicious dog off his chain. She was trying to sound firm, like the teacher she used to be, but the fear made her voice crack. "What do you think you're doing here? You leave here this instant!"

Her name was Agnes but her husband called her "Love" in the letters he wrote from Europe during World War Two. Up in her

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closet there's a little box of photographs from the war. She wore her hair long, like Veronica Lake, and she was so pretty.

I kept one of her photos in the attic. It was of her and her husband, but I cut her husband out, and when I held it for a while I became a soldier in France, lying hard against the basement wall of a farmhouse while the shells rained in. Then after a while, we'd be together in the picture, just the two of us. Agnes didn't know it, but she did love me. I'm really a soldier, just like her husband was.

But today I didn't feel like a soldier. I was as frightened as Agnes was. It was the shock of finding her there when she was supposed to be at work. My knees gave out under me and I kneeled there on the floor of her bedroom, holding my head in my hands, crying.

"What are you doing here?" she asked again. Then she reached for a robe on the chair next to her bed. She was wearing a long nightgown, but she stood and pulled the robe around herself, shaking, as though she'd been naked.

"I don't know," I said. I couldn't tell her I came into her apartment all the time, that I'd read her letters and worn her clothes.

She looked at me for a second, then she walked around me to the stairs.

"What are you going to do?" I asked her, but she didn't answer. She just limped down the stairs as fast as she could, and I realized she was trying to get out of the apartment.

"I won't hurt you!" I shouted, but she was already at the bottom of the stairs and in another couple of seconds she'd be out the door. I couldn't let that happen—once she got outside Mother would find out! So I got up and ran down after her and caught her with her hand on the doorknob.

I tried to reason with her, but she screamed. "Don't scream!" I said and put my hand over her mouth. She bit me, so I grabbed her throat and dragged her to the sofa. She kicked over a lamp and the coffee table and a stack of *Reader's Digest*s spilled onto the floor, but I never let go of her throat. "Don't you remember me from the picture?" I asked when she finally stopped struggling, but she couldn't hear me any more.

I went to the back door and smashed a window pane to make it look as though someone had broken in. Then I opened the door, left it ajar, and went upstairs. I took the whole box of old photographs into the attic with me. Later I'd explain to her why I did it. We'd meet in the picture and I'd make her understand . . .

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The police came after supper. Mother had heated frozen chicken-pot pies, one for her and one for me, and when we were done we heard the first police car. The superintendent was waiting by the open door in back of Agnes's apartment, and soon the whole parking lot was full of police.

All the neighbors were outside in the back yard, talking. The Greens were there. Ben and his mother were outside, too. She was talking to a police detective. But they all stopped talking and watched silently as they carried out Agnes's body, all covered up.

Then little Ben saw me and broke the silence. "Martin-from-the-roof," he shouted, pointing at me with a big grin, "Martin-from-the-roof!"

It's amazing how Ben has learned so many new words, and how much he's noticed. But I had never heard him talk about "the roof" before. I knew he meant the ceiling where I came through the hatch to visit him, but no one else would know that. They couldn't know that.

But Ben kept calling to me, and everyone, even the detective, was looking up and I felt a sudden rush of fear, like when the kids from school used to chase me home. There was only one place I could get away, one place where I could feel safe. So that's where I came—to the attic.

I can hear the police now. Mother must have told them where I am, because they're coming up the stairs. You can hear from the urgency in their steps they sense I'm who they're looking for.

And when they find me here with this box of old photographs, they'll know, oh, God, they'll know for sure.

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a *NEW* short story by

RUTH GRAVIROS

"The dead man paid for the hotel room," N.Y.P.D. homicide detective Jake Burden told his wife Betty, "and signed in under a false name, but the ID in his wallet checked out. His father—who hadn't seen him in two years, since throwing him out of the house in July 1985—identified him at the morgue . . ."

LIES

by RUTH GRAVIROS

"I didn't know the paper was due today," Martha told Betty defensively, handing her a note. Betty looked up from the desk at her fourteen-year-old and opened the note. It was from Martha's English teacher, Mr. Shapiro, stating briefly that Martha hadn't turned in an assignment due today and he expected her parents would want to discuss it with her.

"How couldn't you know?" Betty asked. "You haven't missed any classes this semester, have you?"

"No, I haven't. He didn't tell us when the paper was due."

"Wouldn't that be a strange thing for him to do—give an assignment without a deadline?"

"Well, he did."

"How about the rest of the class? Did they deliver their papers on time? Take off your jacket, Martha, you'll die of the heat."

"Fat chance. It's freezing in here—as usual." The duplex apartment, the top two floors of a mid-Manhattan brownstone, had its charms but a responsible furnace wasn't one of them.

"And you're exaggerating, as usual."

"Then why are you wearing two sweaters and those heavy wool socks?"

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"What about the rest of the class, Martha? Did they turn assignments in or didn't they?"

"Most of them did, I guess. —I don't think Mr. Shapiro likes me, Mother."

Betty wasn't the natural deadpan Martha was, but she was a professional actress, capable of suppressing a spontaneous smile when she chose. "What is the assignment, anyway?"

"Goodbye, Mr. Chips."

"A book report? What could be easier? It's so short—and you watched it on *Masterpiece Theatre* with your father and me."

"There are eighteen chapters in the book and he assigned each of us a chapter to summarize its connection with the rest of the book."

"Its importance in the life of Mr. Chips," Betty mused. Martha shrugged impatiently, not anticipating the effect it would have on her mother's own patience. "Well, have you started the paper, at least?"

"Yes."

"What's the problem?"

"He gave me the worst chapter. Chapter six. It's the second longest chapter in the book."

"There isn't a chapter in that book that could remotely be considered long."

"Well, it's the second longest and it's saying more than one thing. Most of the other chapters say just one thing."

Betty looked at the clock. "Go get comfortable and then bring me what you've done," she said and Martha went off upstairs to her room, peeling off her down jacket as if the world was too much to bear.

"When my love swears she is made of truth," Betty thought, "I do believe her, though I know she lies."

The phone rang and she picked up the receiver. It was Jake, saying he would be an hour late getting home. No later than seven, he promised. They were a man short and there was the usual Monday paperwork. Hanging up, Betty returned to the bills she had finally attacked after days of resolution—symptomatic of her increasing problem with time. No matter how well she tried to organize, the unexpected took priority and she was lucky to accomplish a fraction of what she planned.

After writing checks against Jake's last N.Y.P.D. paycheck, she reached their minimum balance—with three sizeable bills that would have to remain outstanding until her check for the television

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commercial she'd done in the fall materialized—a check she'd been told before Christmas was in the mail, a check she'd been told last week was in the mail.

Martha returned with a dogeared spiral notebook and a copy of the James Hilton novel, set them on the desk, and pulled over a chair. Betty turned to Chapter 6. There were a few lines over eight pages to the chapter, which she reread while Martha frowned over her notes. But her mood was lifting—they were Coping.

When Betty finished the chapter, she looked over at Martha's open notebook. "Is this what you wrote on the chapter?" Martha nodded—and listened and watched as Betty read it aloud.

" 'When Mr. Chips married Katherine he was happier than he had ever believed possible. And in his happiness, he changed from a rather pedantic, conscientious person (schoolmaster?) to a more confident, forward-looking, inspiring (stimulating?) man (schoolmaster?), who came to be loved by his boys.' "

They looked at each other. "It reads very well to me," Betty said. "When did you write this?"

"On the weekend."

"Then why didn't you type it and pass it in? Does he want something longer?"

"He said it should be as long or as short as it needed to be."

"Then *you* don't consider it finished."

Martha scowled and pulled the book over, turning pages until it fell open naturally onto pages 36–37. "There's all this here about his jokes and how he learned to make the boys laugh."

"Lex Canuleia, yes. Remember that was written on the blackboard in the introductions to the three episodes on P.B.S.?"

"Yes—that's why it has to be important. But I didn't get it then and I don't get it now."

Betty read aloud, from the book this time, in her pleasant diction, about Chips' one joke that never failed to please:

" 'Whenever Chips' Roman History forms came to deal with the Lex Canuleia, the law that permitted patricians to marry plebeians—' " Betty looked up. "You know what patricians were?"

"The aristocratic families in Ancient Rome."

"And plebeians?"

"The common families."

"All right—when Chips taught about this law that was passed to permit patricians to marry plebeians, he'd add, 'So that, you see, if Miss Plebs wanted Mr. Patrician to marry her, and he said he

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couldn't, she probably replied, "Oh yes, you can, you liar!" ' " Betty looked from the book to Martha. " 'Roars of laughter.' "

Martha didn't roar with laughter but her face reflected relieved understanding and she closed both books and stood.

"Why did that confuse you, do you think?"

"The Latin, I guess."

"We don't have a Latin dictionary, but maybe Lex Canuleia is in the Webster's Unabridged."

"I'll look it up." Martha started toward the door. "Lex must be 'law.' Maybe it means 'common law.' "

"No, that's *lex non scripta*—the unwritten law."

"Pardon *me.*" Martha was at the stairs.

"Are you going to include this in your summary?" Betty called after her.

"Yes, at the end. To play up the importance of a sense of humor in the classroom!"

Betty opened her mouth, then closed it. She put the checkbook away in a side drawer of the desk, stamped the bills going out for payment, and propped them between the stapler and the Rolodex. She went to the window and looked down at the early home-going traffic in the failing light on Forty-eighth Street. The days were beginning to get longer again, but it still seemed like the dead of winter. Ugly Duckling time of year. She started toward the kitchen to begin dinner, stopping to turn on lights as she went.

Peeling vegetables, she tried a new approach to the lines she'd memorized for a trilogy of one-act plays that was going into rehearsal next week. The one in which she played the lead was full of possibilities that excited and frightened her. And the director was an unknown quantity—a young Russian with a big reputation whose first work in the U.S. this would be.

Oh yes, you can, you liar.

"Liar!" Stella Adler had roared at her in an acting class twenty years ago—that time meaning there was no truth in the performance Betty was giving. Weeks later, toward the end of the same term, when Betty and a classmate finished a scene from *The Children's Hour,* Stella had risen, walked regally over to her, and embraced her. "Liar," she'd purred—meaning Betty had learned how to separate herself from herself and become someone else.

Martha tripped down the stairs at that terrifying pace of hers and

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headed straight for the refrigerator and a Coke. "I smelled the pot roast," she said. She loved pot roast.

"You were in luck. I ordered lamb and Louis sent the wrong thing."

"What a sweetie. As long as he doesn't charge you for it."

"Honest Louis? When he phoned to tell me he made the mistake and was sending Ken over with the exchange, I said the pot roast would be fine and he said he'd be sure to deduct the difference on our tab."

"Isn't Dad late?"

"A little. Have you finished the assignment for Mr. Shapiro?"

"All done."

"Get it to him first thing tomorrow. And apologize."

"I will, I will. —Wouldn't you hate Dad's job?"

"I don't know. Aside from its gruesome aspects—"

"The stuff he sees. He must feel like blowing chow half the time."

Betty paused in her scraping and looked across at her daughter, who raised her eyebrows as if to ask, "Did I say something?"

"Do you want to help me with these vegetables or set the table?"

"I'll set the table."

"Wine glasses for your father and me."

"Sure." Martha placed her glass, containing only ice cubes now, in the sink. "I'd hate *acting,* too. The hours stink."

"So does your vocabulary, my darling."

"How did I get so lucky with both of my parents working flaky hours?"

"Consider yourself lucky to *have* two parents."

"Don't," Martha warned.

"Who me?" said Betty. "I never lecture."

"And I'm queen of the soaps. Hey, that's an idea. Why don't you get a role on a soap? The hours are so much better. *And* the pay."

"And the lines are so much easier," Betty said wistfully.

"Is this part going to be so hard?"

"I won't really know until we start rehearsals. I have to deceive the audience all the way through that I've just arrived at a drug-rehabilitation center when actually I've just been discharged. I come to the lobby with my suitcase to check out as the new arrivals are checking in and they assume I'm one of them."

"And you go along with the misconception?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

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"Complicated reasons. A desire to proselytize. Exercising a new feeling of power. Dirty reasons and clean."

Martha considered. "Nice premise."

"Thank you," Betty said.

After dinner, Martha went off for an evening of hair-washing, telephoning, and homework. Jake brought his dishes to the sink and kissed the left side of Betty's nose. "I'm going to watch the news," he said.

"Brave man."

"I'm making a drink. Want one?"

"Maybe later."

He poured himself a bourbon on ice and went to the living room. It was understood that she did the dishes the days he worked, he did the dishes the days she worked, and Martha did the dishes the days they both worked. Betty heard the sound of the TV come on, and as the news team went through its paces, trying to address the truth as filtered through the White House and the rest of the world, she lost herself in her own thoughts, sudsing, rinsing, wiping, putting away. Beyond the kitchen window, half a block away on restaurant-lined Second Avenue, fireworks rattled and popped a welcome to the Chinese new year. In the living room, a young TV spot reporter at the scene of a hit-and-run announced that the victims were "an elderly couple, fifty-six and fifty-seven years old." Jake had turned forty-six in July and she would be fifty in October. She heard Jake groan and she laughed. "I'll make myself that drink now," she called in to him.

When she joined him in the living room, he was leaning back in the lounger, deep in thought, the television off. She curled up in the chair across from him and considered the Christmas decorations that should be taken down and stored away. "A penny for your thoughts."

"A new case today's got us puzzled."

"Tell me."

"Well—" He took a drink. "We had a call about eight-thirty from Joint Diseases. A twenty-two-year-old kid named John Rivera was found bleeding to death on the street a block away with a knife wound in his arm. We had an alert out for his attacker when about ten o'clock we got a call from a hotel three blocks north of the hospital that an overnight guest, male, had been discovered stabbed to death

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in his room—wearing only socks and a turtleneck shirt. He'd checked in with another guy around midnight and the other guy was gone."

"Rivera?"

Jake nodded. "The dead man paid for the room and signed in under a false name, but the ID in his wallet checked out. His father—who hadn't seen him in two years, since throwing him out of the house in July 1985—identified him at the morgue."

"How old was he?"

"Thirty-seven. From Queens. He worked as a billing clerk for the phone company. —Jimmy and I went to the scene. A fleabag. The clerk was illiterate—Parsons could have signed in as King Kong and it would have been the same to him. There was only the bed in the room—no closet, no dresser. The walls were a bloody mess."

"Literally."

"Yeah. We went from there to Joint Diseases. Rivera was just coming alive after surgery. The doctor said they were lucky to save his arm. We got in to talk to him, though. He's bandaged from here to here—" Jake chopped his right shoulder and fingers with his left hand— "and he's groggy, but alert, too, you know?

"He admitted spending the night with Parsons. They met last night for the first time at the Eighty-sixth Street stop on the Lexington Avenue line. They got talking and when he told Parsons he had no special plans except going home, Parsons said he'd rent them a room, they could bring in takeout and talk. He was into this witchcraft cult—there was a paperback about it in his tote bag—and he was hyper about it. Rivera said he went along because he was lonely and hungry. —He's unemployed."

"Go on." Betty leaned over and turned on the radio, very low.

"So they brought in some Chinese food and talked and then they fell asleep."

"Oh?"

"Right. He says they were bombed when they met—they'd both been doing the bars on Eighty-sixth."

"So then they woke up."

"Rivera says it was showing light at the window when Parsons woke him. Rivera still had his clothes on but Parsons' pants were off and he wanted Rivera to do stuff Rivera didn't want to do. When Parsons started to get rough about it, Rivera dove for this knife Parsons had showed him in his tote bag the night before and tried to get out of the room by defending himself with it."

"I hate this," Betty said.

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"Parsons tried to retrieve the knife and they battled it out until Parsons went down for the count."

"And Rivera took off."

"With the knife, yeah."

"Parsons' knife. Have you got it?"

Jake nodded. "Exhibit A in The People versus John Rivera, if it comes to that."

"Why would he go to a hotel with someone he just met if he didn't expect sex?"

"Money."

"For payment, you mean—or to roll him. Did Rivera have much money on him when they picked him up?"

"Less than two dollars in change."

"What about Parsons?"

"Zilch. His pants and his tote bag and everything from the bag were on the bed—but there was no money there or anywhere in the room."

"*Nothing?*"

"No."

"*That's* worth thinking about."

"It's exactly what I was thinking about when you promised me a penny for my thoughts."

"And Parsons paid for the room."

Jake turned up the sound a little on Benny Goodman playing Copland's *Concerto for Clarinet and String Orchestra*. "He paid, all right."

"The room clerk may not know how to read but he must know how to count money. Did he find the body?"

"No. The cleaning man saw blood in the hall and traced it to the room."

"One of them could have taken Parsons' money."

"I'm not sure we'll ever find out what happened to any money he may have had left after paying for the room, but Rivera says he killed him unintentionally, in self-defense, with this knife we have. It's the claim of self-defense I'm trying to come to terms with."

"But money could be at the bottom of it."

"It probably is. Parsons might even have ripped off Rivera, and the desk clerk or someone else who was in that room before Jimmy and I got there ripped off Parsons."

"Wouldn't Rivera have told you if Parsons had ripped him off?"

"Not if he decided to plead self-defense."

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"You think he's lying, then."

Jake reached for his bourbon. "I'd rather hear what you think."

The sane, sweet music was the only sound for a while, then: "I want to believe him," Betty said.

"I suppose I do, too. He says he's no killer. And that cut on his arm was lethal."

"Could he have inflicted it on himself?"

"I doubt it."

"What kind of knife is it?"

"An ordinary street knife."

"Would someone carry a knife like that in a *tote bag?*"

"I suppose someone might but I've never known it to happen. Usually they tuck them in their waistband."

"What do you think, Jake? Do you think he's lying?"

"About something I can't put my finger on, yes, I do. He's younger and more agile. He stabbed Parsons at least a dozen times. I don't think that was necessary for self-defense. And Parsons died on the floor on the far side of the room from the door. I'm pretty sure the knife belonged to Rivera, not Parsons."

"What about drugs?"

"We don't have an autopsy report. If Rivera had any traces, they didn't mention it at the hospital."

They listened to the end of the second movement of the concerto, Jake half absently fingering the notes, pinning the last one midair with his index finger.

"We're so lucky, Jake."

He rested his head back on the recliner and thought. "To die is different from what anyone supposed, and luckier."

"For poor Mr. Parsons, maybe."

"I wouldn't be surprised."

The bedside clock read 8:10 when Betty woke to the by no-means-routine sound of Jake singing in the shower.

"Humday I'm going to murder the buglar/Humday they're going to find him dead/I'll hamputate his reveille and step upon it heavily/And hend the rest of my life in hed." By-no-means routine and she'd never heard him hum this one before, however much he hated to get up in the morning. He probably wasn't even aware of what he was humming, if he knew he *was* humming. Betty turned luxuriously to face the window. The subconscious mind.

Yesterday morning around this time, the act was being played

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out by those two men, Rivera and Parsons, or had been played out out in that bare and bloody room uptown, and Parsons was dying or already dead. Rivera stumbling away with the knife, Parsons collapsed on the floor with no pants on, just socks and a shirt. —She pushed her thoughts of them away. Time to get up and dressed and—

"Jake?" She sat up in bed. "Jake?"

The bathroom door opened partway and he stuck his head out, toweling it. "What's up?"

"Me in a minute. —Jake, your murder yesterday."

"What about it?"

"Parsons was getting dressed. He'd been undressed and he was getting dressed."

Jake stopped toweling and stared at her. "He hadn't taken off his pants—he'd put on his shirt."

"It makes sense, doesn't it?"

"Absolutely. It was the idea that kept eluding me last night. It was pay-up time. Maybe Parsons had promised to pay Rivera and then wouldn't. Maybe he'd promised him more than he delivered. Or maybe he didn't promise him anything but Rivera wanted anything he had and was enraged that he didn't have more on him."

"Scary how right this sounds. But it doesn't mean we're right, does it?"

"That's a jury's job to decide. Rivera's innocent unless they decide differently." Jake disappeared back into the bathroom and Betty swung her feet over onto the Spanish-wool rug at the side of the bed, which she was studying when Jake called out.

"Misdirection!"

"What?"

"That's what it's called when you're led to think in a certain way so you're not likely to see the way it really was!"

Which is what I have to do in this bloody play, Betty thought. And thought some more about how Helene, her character, would feel as the idea of going along with the other characters' mistaken perception of her took hold. She caught sight of her face in the dressing-table mirror and was startled at the cunning in her eye. —Too much.

"Misdirection!" Jake exulted.

"I *hope* not," Betty said darkly.

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a *NEW* Big Red Fred story by

THOMAS ADCOCK

"The trouble with you," One-Eye told Slapman, "is you're too imaginary."

What in the Sam Hill did "imaginary" mean, Sammy wanted to know.

"Guys that is always thinking," One-Eye said, "is doing the worse possible harm to theirselfs. A hold-up man, f'instance, if all he can think about before a stick-up is the odds of his getting made, is liable to get the shakes and make a mess outa the stick-up."

Thomas Adcock's first story in EQMM, "Christmas Cop," won him an Edgar nomination for best mystery short story of 1986, and his "Thrown-Away Child" placed second in your vote for the 1986 EQMM Readers Award . . .

SMART SAMMY SLAPMAN

by THOMAS ADCOCK

Sometimes in my business a terrific story drops out of the blue and practically tells itself. Since I'm an old fellow who only gets paid by the piece down at the magazine where I'm working these days, I'm in an excellent position to deeply appreciate the wear-and-tear I'm saved when the heavens give me one. Which in a manner of speaking is just what happened the other evening as I made the acquaintance of a faithful reader and hapless sociopath by the colorful handle of Smart Sammy Slapman.

"Say!" he called out to me like he was some regular gentleman with a worsted wool suit from Hughes & Hatcher and clean fingernails and a warm house to go to instead of where he actually was

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going with the assistance of a couple of Detroit cops. "Ain't you Fred Walsh, the writer they call 'Big Red Fred'?"

The miscreant who correctly identified me was tall and lanky and substantially beyond middle age, sort of like me but thinner and more time-ravaged. He had lots of white hair gone limp and yellowish, and there was about a half century of whiskey and cigarettes in his voice. His face was packed full of creases and grey-brown shadows, which is how a man gets when his life alternates between jail cells and single rooms in cheesy hotels, where he dines alone on hamburgers in waxed paper or takeout Chinese and the stall shower down at the end of the hall runs mostly cold.

"So, Fred," he said to me from between the two cops, "maybe you should like to print an autobiography of myself? One man's life of crime, that sort of thing. I tell you, I'm good for a piquant yarn. That there's a twenty-five-cent word I once read is a very essential ingredient for your kind of story, am I right? I'm a great reader is how I know about you, Fred. I always had a lot of time for reading.

"Leave me introduce myself. My name's Samuel G. Slapman. The middle initial, I like to kid on the square, is for 'goniff.' I used to use Sam Smith as my *nom de plume* when they booked me, but to hell with that now. What's to hide any more? To my intimate pals, I am known as Smart Sammy. Yeah, I got a nickname like you. Maybe we got more in common. You want to find out?"

Smart Sammy was not much problem for the cops, both of them young and burly, so they weren't holding him tight—just touching his elbows to make it clear he was a collar. Sammy was free enough to strum on a ukulele he was holding, which suddenly made him seem like an ordinary pensioner on a beach in the Canary Islands or someplace like that, where nothing mattered but where he'd be having a highball when the sun went low over a pleasant sea.

He stopped strumming and looked past me. Then Samuel G. Slapman heaved an enormous and melancholy sigh that made him sound approximately a thousand years old. And without a second thought, I knew he was my kind of story.

We were seated across from one another in a grubby one-man detention pen at number 1300 Beaubien Street, which is headquarters of the Detroit Police Department—Slapman on the edge of a steel bunk folded down from a cinderblock wall, me in a beige-plastic chair with a cracked back. I was just visiting, thank you, as crime reporter for *Detroit Expression*.

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It was half past eight o'clock. Outside, it was growing dark on a hot September night and in the better precincts of the city there were people sitting out on apartment balconies with limed gin, watching lights over the river die down and talking about what's closing next in Detroit. Smart Sammy had been booked and his fingertips were still tacky with ink. He'd been obliged to spend the night in holding until a morning arraignment-hearing since he was way over his credit line with the neighborhood bailbondsmen.

Only an hour ago, I'd finished up my reward after a hard day's nosing about for news. This consisted of two Old Parr scotches, neat, at the Athens Bar on Monroe Street, right around the corner from the cop shop where I maintain a desk in the press room. I'd been on my way to the bus stop and home to Jean, who is my wife and who I like calling Old Sexy, when along came Samuel G. Slapman, a/k/a Sam Smith, a/k/a Smart Sammy, in the arms of John Law. And I wound up where I was, all ears for Mr. Slapman with an eye to being his chronicler.

Sammy lit up a cigarette. It had been given to him by one of the kid cops who busted him and it stank like all hell. It occurred to me that this broken-down poot across from me smelled rather like the young secretaries at the magazine office, who also smoke and have come a long way, baby. His ukulele was in his lap and he plucked at it idly while plumes of smoke burned into his unflinching eyes.

He said to me, of all things, "So you still quite the pinko?"

"You're talking about the blacklist days?"

"It interests me about you," he said. "The politics of it don't interest me any more'n a rat's fanny. It's just you and me got in common the fact of us being way off the main stem."

"I guess that last part's true. But me, I am interested in politics. The only thing is, I didn't care to name my brand back in the Fifties. I don't see any reason to feel any different today."

Sammy laughed, with a cough. "At least it's safe enough now to keep your own counsel, hey?" He took the cigarette from his lips and stubbed out the lighted end against the hard edge of the bunk, then carefully slipped the butt into his shirt pocket.

The plastic chair made my skin hot and itchy, and I felt like a heel for taking note of this since I was sitting there with a guy who had ninety percent decided to trust me enough to confess his sorrows, which would make me some money the easy way.

I said to him, "I thought I was here for your story."

"Oh, sure—sure you are. It's just that I've been thinking all the

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time lately how people are so much alike, no matter how they pretend it ain't so. I mean, *everybody's* got bad luck in life. People live with it. Or they don't. Like you and other guys who were blacklisted. Some of you survived, some didn't. But it was the same bad luck, wasn't it?"

"You might have something there."

"Sure I do, Fred. You and me, we both had this bad luck in life. You because you had principles, me 'cause I never had any. Either way, it got us both blacklisted one way or another."

Then he started on the ukulele again. He raised his face up to a ceiling scarred by leaky water pipes and his eyes swept over the bars and cinder blocks. And tears ran down through the grooves in his old face as he started singing a tune I remember from when I was a kid in plus fours, "The Blue-Tail Fly."

"Jimmy crack corn and I don't care.
Jimmy crack corn and I don't care.
Jimmy crack corn and
I don't care.
My Master's gone away."

He stopped and we sat there listening to the echoes of the song fade into the sad walls. I didn't know what to say to him that might give him some ease, except to pick up on what he'd first said we held in common, which I figured from what he'd been saying might please him.

"You mentioned we both have nicknames, Sammy. They call me Big Red Fred because I had to work for the only newspaper that would have me in the Fifties, the *Daily Worker.*"

"The Commie paper."

"Yeah, but I didn't write on politics. I wrote on crime, just like I'm doing now—which is for a magazine that also isn't necessarily my kind of place."

What an understatement. It's no bragging to tell you that my piece in the last issue of *Detroit Expression* was the only thing worth your time. The rest of the magazine was a long photo layout on where to buy the best fudge in town, how to dress at the office to show the boss you're cut out to be a hard-charging executive, and this drooling profile of a corporate foozle who recently discovered that quite a few youngsters—even out in suburbia—gobble down drugs every day and, even worse, seem to have lost sight of the work ethic altogether, in spite of all manner of minimum-wage jobs that go begging.

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Sammy laughed again. He sounded hollow, but at least the tears stopped. There are few things in the world more pitiful to me than seeing an old man cry.

"Nicknames," he said. "The one they give me, it rankles my bosom. Back when I got tagged with it, it was because my big mouth was running off about how I was going to be this high-classed confidence man instead of what I—"

He stopped himself for a second. "Maybe you should get out whatever it is you got to take the story down. You use pen and paper or a tape-recording machine?"

"Both," I said. I took a pad and pencil out of a pocket on one side of my jacket and a tape-recorder out of the one on the other side. "The machine's to get your exact words like you want to say them. I use the pad and pencil to keep track of my own impressions."

"That makes sense." He coughed and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "Okay now, you're about to learn how I, Smart Sammy Slapman, tried to work himself up from goniff to con. This ain't no success story like your magazine likes best, that's for sure. And maybe when I'm done you'll think I ought to be called *Stupid* Sammy Slapman. But anyways, if I'm any good at telling my own story to your little machine there, you should once in a while laugh. People like to laugh it up, you know. They say it makes you feel better about life."

Then he told me his story.

So, like I say, I'm casing for a big future for myself back there when Hector was a pup and I'm blabbing all over the place about how my ambition is to be referred to in the newspapers as Smart Sammy.

Anyways, I cook up this scam where I go around telling widow-women I represent a life-insurance company. Well, the first widow-woman I call on, she looks like she's going to fall for the baloney, because she gets up from the chair where we're sitting in her parlor and says she's coming back with cabbage she's got hid under the mattress. But what she really does is go back to her kitchen and ring up the cops. And I go up in front of this judge who tells me to knock it off and maybe I should get the hell out of Detroit or next time he'll put me in the trap.

Well, I don't leave town and I go and try the same thing again. This time the old girl tells me to go and perform this biologically impossible thing. Time after that, I call on a widow-woman up near

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Highland Park and she takes out a policy by paying me with a phony twenty-spot, for which I have to give her change of a ten. And then I'm damn near nicked for trying to pass off her twenty.

Smart of me, hey?

Seeing there is something basically wrong with this widow-woman racket, I decide to shake down this parking-lot owner by sneaking a handful of sugar into a bunch of his customers' gas tanks. Then coming around to make out like I'm a downtown private eye with my own office and I can find out the louse that's causing him trouble. The only thing is, there's this little stream of sugar that's falling out of my pants leg just as I'm making my deal with him and the next thing I know I'm standing in front of this judge again, telling him I was framed. This time, the judge gives me April-May-June in the county trap and says he don't want me to get on his nerves any more.

It was in the trap, after they heard about the sugar dribbling out of my pants, that they tagged me Smart Sammy. Like a schlemazel, I'm at first flattered. Then it dawns on me I'm a goat. I tell my cellmate, "Okay, you're all so brilliant, you and your genius friends, how come you're in here with me?" This he can't answer, so I don't feel so bad now. Maybe Smart Sammy will fit someday.

Finally, the county releases me and I'm thinking how I can come up with some new scam to cinch the reputation of my new nickname. And one night while I'm in a dive gnawing on a beer with my last six bits and feeling desperate enough to go look for legit work, I read in the *Detroit Times* how this outfit called the Good and Bubbly Soda-Pop Corporation is running a contest. Every letter you mailed in no later than midnight on Tuesday that named the right number of words that could be spelled from Good and Bubbly Soda-Pop can maybe wind up winning a nifty prize. Right away I figure on making a fix with some post-office geek who will hang onto an empty envelope for me, which he will cancel with a Monday postmark. So on Wednesday, when the winning list of words comes out in the paper, see, I just copy and insert this info in the envelope and have the clerk deliver it and say how it was delayed and all. And when they give me the prize, I will divide up the mookey with the postal clerk. Neat, hey?

I go ahead and chat up this clerk by the name of Darryl C. Pye, who takes a long time before he understands what I'm telling him, but finally he says he'll throw in with me. So on Monday, I give Pye the envelope and he squirrels it away. Then on Wednesday, the list

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is printed in the *Detroit Times* and I copy it down and haul off to the post office and get my cancelled envelope back from him and stick in the list and seal it up and hand it back to him. And out of nowheres this government postal inspector is showing me tin and the next thing I know I'm up before this federal judge.

Well, you can imagine how bitter I am against Darryl C. Pye. I try my best to point out to this judge—who thank God ain't the one I seen two times before already—how Pye's just as crooked as me. The judge don't see it that way and gives me your five-year jolt. But on account of how no actual fraud was ever gotten away with, he later on suspended my jolt before it was up.

However, when I'm released I find myself financially without money. And I'm going slightly crazy, since it looks like maybe I'm not going to make it as a high-classed confidence man. Maybe, I'm beginning to think, I'm going to have to fall back on doing some muscle jobs for my do-re-mi.

Actually, I ain't got a choice in the matter. Pretty soon I'm owing about six months' arrears on a dump in this rooming house, and the landlady—who is a widow-woman, what else?—is threatening to put my keister out on the curb for the street-sweepers unless I pay up or work out the back rent by helping out around her fleabag of a place.

Well, there I am, all my visions of being the smoothest article in all Detroit burnt up in smoke and the only muscle I'm using is to sweep up hallways and tuck in sheets nice like they do in the hospitals, like the old landlady teaches me. And I'm even downstairs in her flat doing her dirty dishes and washing her bloomers and dusting her damn furniture with doilies all over it and having to sit down with her for tea besides. What else I done I ain't going into here because it's too pathetic. But I tell you, Fred, there was times in the privacy of the mop closet when I just plain blubbered.

Finally, I figured I had to get out and bust into someplace. I was a good clip, and a booster besides, and in those days there was still lots of good stores in Detroit with stuff worth my while. What I done is a jewelry shop out on Livernois Avenue, uptown on the West Side. I'm not Smart Sammy Slapman for nix, so I shrewdly time my bust-in with the absence of the cop on the beat, who I have already found out goes off for a couple of slugs of beer around eleven o'clock. I cast my eyes on the jewels through the window and crack open the door, naturally figuring I have finally hit my stride. I keep my eyes peeled while I'm cleaning up a nice haul and then I'm out of there.

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Well, it don't work out so slick. What I don't know is the jewelry shop locks up the good stuff overnight and puts paste in the showcase at night for the window shoppers. No fence is going to look at that junk even once. This is a terrible shock to me—not to mention another humiliation. I manage to dump some bum wristwatches on this Norwegian sailor I found in a dive down on Woodbridge for ten bucks, which I hope to sweet Jesus ain't counterfeit again, and the rest of the garbage I swap with a Brush Street peddler for one of them electric toothbrushes and a tan-leather book I first think is adventure stories about some guy who dresses all in buckskins but which I later realize is meant to be read by Miss Nellie, if you catch my drift.

I am now seriously depressed. But not completely discouraged. Not until, as my luck would have it, this here Norwegian sailor has me nicked because the watches I sold him ain't got works in any of them. I am hauled up in front of a new judge for defrauding this poor dumb foreigner—which is something of a stymie, since how am I going to explain to the judge that I clipped them watches in good faith? Since I cannot explain, I am given January-February-March-April-May-June-July-August out in the countryside, at the Detroit House of Correction.

During my visit at Dehoco, I meet up with this other guest, who's missing an eyeball and who is also a booster and a clip, and down on his luck like me. From him I learn quite a lot of new twists and angles to the trade. And I get this advice from him: "The trouble with you, Slapman, is you're too imaginary."

What in the Sam Hill does "imaginary" mean is what I want to know.

He says, "Guys that is always thinking is doing the worse possible harm to theirselfs. A hold-up man, f'rinstance, if all he can think about before a stick-up is the odds of his getting made, is liable to get the shakes and make a mess outa the stick-up."

So I ask him, "How is a guy going to help himself from being imaginary?"

And One-Eye says, "Just quit thinking, see. Stick-ups is a snap. You're sitting around someplace not doing nothin' and suddenly you figure you'll go out and pull a stick-up, that's all. That's the system. Before you've got time to *think* and get all imaginary about what might happen, yer out sticking somebody up."

So I'm finally the hell out of Dehoco and walking the streets free and broke, and I'm going over in my mind this advice from One-Eye.

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One night I'm standing around a mailbox on Oakman Boulevard, and the street lamps is dimlike and I'm looking pretty bored and innocent and am convincing myself that I could pull a stick-up if I felt like it—with the help, of course, of the twenty-two pistol I'd bought down in Toledo with the bedrock tenner I keep in my shoe. And along comes this elderly lady. My heart leaps into my throat!

For a very long time, Fred, I've got this feeling of frustration with regard to elderly old women. This is understandable on account of my insurance experiences and also the fact of my landlady being not exactly the subject of my most affectionate regards. It was therefore my sincere wish that the old lady who is now coming along should be my first stick-up.

So she comes up opposite me near the mailbox and it's now or never, sink or swim. I leap out at her with my Toledo pistol with the trigger I suddenly notice is so loose it's ready to fall out. "Get over there, into the shadows!" I yell at her.

This lady stops where she is and puts this puzzled look on her puss. She says to me, she says, "I am over sixty, my dear young man, and I don't hear too good any more. What did you say?"

I crowd her off into the shadows and put my kisser right up to her ear and say, "Your money or your life!" I stick the business end of my pistol into her ribs and, sure enough, the trigger drops out, but I'm hoping she don't notice this technicality.

She says, "Nuts!"

I says, "Huh?"

"Nuts to you is what I say, young man. Be off with you."

So I says, "Listen, this here's a stick-up! I got this here rod! So hand over the alligator!"

She says, "The what?"

I says, "The alligator—you know, lady, your purse."

"Young man," she says, "don't you realize we have laws in this city? You, a great big lummux going about holding up defenseless women! That's the trouble with the world today—there are altogether too many people like you, who haven't the gumption to get honest work. Why, when I was a ten-year-old girl in—"

"Lady," I says to her, and I don't mind telling you I'm by now looking up and down the street nervouslike, "I ain't got time to listen to no family history. All's I need is your alligator, see? How much dough you got in the bag?"

"You move along, you ruffian," she says, "I've no intention of handing over my money to a loafer like you."

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"Lady," I plead, "this here is a *stick-up!* You ain't supposed to debate me. You really think I want to give you the business with this rod? Just hurry up and hand it over before some cop comes by."

"Well, that is entirely *your* worry, young man," she says. "I should have a very poor opinion of myself if I sank so low as to be compelled to go about holding up old women at the point of a cannon."

Well, as you can imagine, Fred, I feel like I'm back in my landlady's closet about to burst into tears. "Look, missus," I finally tell her, "you're driving me crackers. This here's a stick-up so leave us not waste each other's time no more. You give me half what you got and we'll call it a day—now ain't that fair?"

"No," the old babe says, "I won't give you anything. I should say not."

"Okay then," I says, feeling crazy, "ain't it worth, say, three lousy bucks not to get yourself shot and killed to death?"

"No."

"Lady!"

"Young man—young beast, I should say—I will give you precisely fifty cents. Not a penny more."

Everything I got in the way of veins in my head is now throbbing. I take the four bits and let her go.

Now, for several decades after that shameful episode, Fred, I'm back to clipping and boosting. And when that don't pay, I'm delivering sandwiches or selling my blood or doing some kind of donkey work or other. Still, I had to spend time now and again in jail. And before you know it, I got no teeth and my hair's white and I got these senior-citizen passes for the bus and the movie houses, which is a good enough deal but I'd give up for being thirty-five and paying retail.

I don't know, I guess my heart was broken because I never did become a high-classed con. I figure I was bottomed-out, brother. Like somebody put me on a blacklist.

But even worst is yet to come.

What happened was, I got flung out of my place by my landlady when I told her no more tea and—well, anyways, it was quite a row and she says to me, "No ukulele-playing hooligan is going to sleep under my roof! Out with you, Mister Samuel G. Slapman, and take your ukulele with you!"

The uke she was referring to is the one I got here. I clipped it from a music store, the reason for which was simple. I told myself I will take one last stab at being a high-classed confidence man. I will clip

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a musical instrument and I will sing tunes on the street, like for example "The Blue-Tail Fly," and I'll preach against the wages of crime. People will gather around me and I'll tell them how they should never decide on being no criminals since they're looking at one horrible example of how crime don't pay, which in my case at least it don't. I will further tell them that since I have to make an honest living to the best of my ability as an old coot, I will pass around my hat and take up a collection to redeem myself. I think this could be a very sweet racket if it should pan out—my fate is in the hands of society. I see by all the papers these days, not to mention the bestseller list, that being a reformed crook is now a going proposition, so how can I lose?

Well, maybe you, a truly smart person whose bad luck wasn't probably so bad as mine, maybe you can guess what happened.

These two cops, they come along and put the nick on me for obstructing traffic on Woodward Avenue and West Hancock. And here I am again, on the way to seeing another judge tomorrow.

My hand hurt from taking down all that Slapman had not said—the times he'd sighed heavily and fallen silent, and considered his surroundings and shuddered.

"So I made you laugh?" he asked.

I told him he had.

"I feel better now that I've told you all this stuff," he said. He took the cigarette butt from his shirt pocket and lit it up. It sputtered and fumed before he was able to draw smoke. "Will it be in the magazine? You think people will believe it?"

"I have to talk to my editor about it," I told him. "You never know about editors, Sammy, let alone readers. So I don't know."

I wasn't feeling in the pink at that point. Many times I've sat in cells with men, guilty or otherwise, and I've always felt vaguely sick. More than anything else, more than even another shot of Old Parr, I wanted to be home on Penrod Street to take a warm bath and listen to a little jazz on the radio and then slip into bed with Old Sexy.

"Listen," I said to Smart Sammy as the jailer clanked his keys in the lock to let me out, "I'm going to look in on you in the morning before court."

He laughed his hollow laugh and said, "Hokey-dokey. I'll be waiting, me and my ukulele. Ain't that a kick in the teeth?"

"What is?"

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"The cops figure I'm such a nothing I'm the owner of this here uke—like I ain't even good enough to be a clip no more."

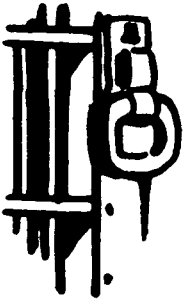
As I walked down the cellblock corridor with the jailer I heard him singing.

"Jimmy crack corn and I don't care.
Jimmy crack corn and I don't care
Jimmy crack corn and
I don't care.
My Master's gone away."

The last I saw of him was first thing in the morning—before an arraignment that didn't matter any more.

I showed up at seven o'clock and accompanied the jail attendant on breakfast rounds. All those whose fates were in the hands of society would be served, at no charge, Corn Flakes in skimmed milk, a buttered bun, an orange, black coffee, and a cigarette at personal option.

Samuel G. Slapman would not be having breakfast. He lay in the corner of his pen, on the floor. His face was very nearly the same ghastly blue color as the skimmed milk on his tray and his eyes were all sorts of orange and brown and bugged out from his head. And there was quite a lot of dark, clotted blood over his throat, where he'd given himself the business with the ukulele strings.



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a *NEW* short story by

GEORGE BAXT

"The second time he murdered," Ike Singer told Agnes and Nedda, "he ate a dish of Puffed Rice. The third time, it was Farina. Then Shredded Wheat. Followed by—let me think—oh, yeah, All-Bran with raisins. Then Special K. And so on. The tabloids latched onto it big. They called him the Cereal Killer."

Ike Singer, detective—nephew of the retired Jacob Singer, one of whose cases back in the Twenties you really should read about in George Baxt's The Dorothy Parker Murder Case, *available at bookstores across the country in both hardcover (St. Martin's) and paperback (International Polygonics) . . .*

NEATNESS COUNTS

by GEORGE BAXT

"I've had some pretty strange cases in my career," Detective Ike Singer told his two companions in a Times Square restaurant the tourists hadn't discovered, "but none as weird as the one I was assigned when I first made detective. That was about ten years ago." He sipped his Bloody Mary while studying the two women. One was Agnes Day, an agent who represented authors exclusively, and the other was one of her clients, Nedda Maguire. Nedda, who wrote about true crime, was staring past his head at something behind him that apparently was disturbing her.

Agnes Day meticulously buttered a piece of bread, cut the bread into eight bite-size pieces, and then leaned back in her chair, exhausted. Singer picked up the thread of his narrative with enthusiasm. "This guy committed nine murders, all in this one small area on Staten Island."

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"What was weird about him?" asked Agnes, wondering when she could phone her answering service to check for messages.

"He only killed in the morning—breakfast time."

Nedda Maguire asked, "What was his modus?"

"Strangulation."

"Were all his victims women?"

"How'd you guess?"

Nedda shrugged. Agnes was chewing vigorously and wondering if the waiter had to fly to Alaska to get their chef's salads. She said, "There's got to be more to it than that to make the guy weird. Did he perform unnatural acts?"

"Oh, no," Ike said, "he was a gentleman. Everything he did was very natural." He wondered what Nedda was staring at. He refused to turn and see for himself. He leaned on the table and interlaced his fingers. "The first time he murdered, he made himself a dish of oatmeal."

"How can you be sure?" asked Nedda, who was a meticulous researcher.

"The victim didn't eat the stuff. It was in the house for her husband who came from New England, where I'm told they dote on oatmeal."

"Did he leave fingerprints on the dish?"

"Yup."

"Didn't you try to trace him?"

"Of course. But no luck. The second time he murdered, he ate a dish of Puffed Rice. The third time, it was Farina. Then Shredded Wheat. Followed by—let me think—oh, yeah, All-Bran with raisins. Then Special K. And so on."

"Where the hell's our salads?" growled Agnes Day, who was usually a lamb.

"Did the case make the papers?" asked Nedda. "I don't seem to remember it if it did."

"Yeah, the tabloids latched onto it big. They called him the Cereal Killer."

"Did you ever catch him?" asked Nedda.

Singer shook his head slowly from side to side. "We thought we were closing in on him, but he changed his diet and gave us the slip. What the *hell* are you staring at, Nedda?"

"Behind you, on the wall. That damn picture. It's crooked. Will you for God's sake straighten it before I go berserk?"

Agnes clucked her tongue and explained to the detective. "Nedda's

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compulsive. Had she come along after your Cereal Killer, she'd have washed his dish and straightened up the kitchen."

Singer had gotten up and was straightening the offending picture, a framed still from the first *Thin Man* movie. "Actually, the guy was a real pig. He slopped his food all over the table and the floor. But luck was on his side—we could never catch up with him. But we haven't closed the book on the case. There, Nedda, is it okay?"

"Yes, thank you. Oh, hell, look who's here."

Agnes recognized Nedda's lawyer, Hannah Farley, bearing down on them. She identified her for the detective. "Talk about slobs," said Agnes, "look at the stains on her clothes. She still hasn't mended that rip in her jacket. I think she sleeps in it. You should see the state of her apartment. On Sutton Place yet and it's in a condition that would bring a song to the lips of the Collier Brothers."

"Well, fancy running into you two here!" caroled Hannah Farley as a button dropped from her sleeve into Ike Singer's Bloody Mary. Agnes introduced her to the detective, who fished the button out of the glass with a spoon and placed it on the table. Nedda was glowering. "Oh, will you look at Nedda. She's still mad at me! She's been mad at me for weeks!"

"Go away, Hannah," said Nedda, her voice soft, the tone ominous.

Hannah took a chair from an adjacent table, positioned it between Ike Singer and Nedda, and sat. She propped up an elbow, ignorant of the fact it was in the butter dish, and asked Singer, "Are you helping Nedda with her book? What's it called, dear?"

"Go away, Hannah."

"That's a good title." Hannah said to Singer, "Nedda's mad at me because I won't sue two goniffs who own an advertising agency who've stolen an idea of hers for a television series."

"Sounds like you've got a case to me," commented Singer.

"You don't understand," said Nedda. "Hannah doesn't like to go to court. If you want to avoid a trial, hire Hannah."

"Come, come, Nedda. I've been your lawyer for over twenty years—"

"No longer."

"What?"

"I said no longer. Now go away. I've got a new lawyer and we're suing. And if you don't want to take center stage in a scene I'm about to stage, you'll get the hell away from this table."

"Shame on you, Nedda. Shame on you." The lawyer made no move to leave. "After all I've done for you. How ungrateful! I took you on

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as a client when you didn't have a sou, not a penny, not one red cent. I carried you for free for years until you finally found a publisher. You'd never have won that suit, and if you're using a new person just to get at those two guys believe you me you're wasting your time and your money—you haven't a hope in hell!" She overturned Singer's Bloody Mary. He leapt to his feet with a yell. Agnes handed him a napkin. A waiter appeared to change the tablecloth. Hannah swept away, butter clinging to her elbow, Bloody Mary stains on her skirt, head held high with dignity.

Later, over coffee and brandies, Nedda explained Hannah Farley to Ike. "She was as much of a nobody as I was when we found each other. I was from Brooklyn, she was from The Bronx—and very, very determined to make it big as a show-business lawyer. By foul means or fair, it didn't matter to her, she was determined to get to the top of the mountain. And she got there."

"In glorious disarray," added Agnes.

Singer asked Agnes, "You knew her back then, too?"

"I knew of her. I didn't actually meet her until about five years ago. That was when Nedda came to me. I remember that first luncheon when Nedda introduced us. I remember watching in fascination as she slurped cold bouillon down her chin onto her blouse, blissfully oblivious. But I had to compliment her on her client list. It's topheavy with celebrities and powerful politicos and God what."

Nedda interjected bitterly, "Hannah judges her friends by their bank balances."

Agnes reclaimed center stage. "I said to her, 'I wish I had friends as powerful as yours,' and she said, 'Sweetie, I got friends I haven't even used yet.' " She torched a cigarette and sipped her brandy.

"Hey there, Nedda," said Singer with a charming smile, "come out of it. She's not worth it."

"I was thinking of her filthy apartment," said Nedda. "She has this display of celebrity gifts—a silver tea set from Mary Pickford, a braided gold lariat from L. B. Johnson—"

"Don't forget that sterling-silver ice pick from Alfred Hitchcock," Agnes reminded her.

Singer commented, "She doesn't look old enough to have known all those people back then."

"She didn't. Their lawyers brought Hannah in as consultant on certain cases. It's like I told you," said Nedda, "you want to stay out of court, get Hannah Farley. Well, she sure kept me out of court. She's cost me hundreds of thousands of dollars."

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"You can't be sure of that," said Singer. "What do you think this pair stole from you?"

"Think! I know! Agnes knows. *Hannah* knows. A syndicated true-crime series, *Killer Dillers*. I worked on it for three years! Three long years!"

"She really did," abetted Agnes. "Nedda dug up stories long forgotten—unknown. I mean, nobody can match her when it comes to researching material. So now those bastards have sold a series to over one hundred and fifty markets—and do you know what they call it? *Killer Chillers!* Is that chutzpa or is that chutzpa?"

"It's not nice," was Singer's delicate comment.

"I'll get them," said Nedda—with difficulty as her teeth were clenched. "I'll get those thieves."

"Don't you have a writers' guild to protect you?" Singer asked the ladies.

"Ha!" That was Nedda.

"You see, Ike," said Agnes, after signaling the waiter for more coffee, "they need an awful lot of scripts for a show like that. That means an awful lot of writers get work. I'm not saying the guild doesn't work to protect their writers, because they do, but writers in the plural take favor over writer in the singular. Besides, Nedda doesn't belong to this guild. She's never written television scripts. It's a very unpleasant situation."

"Nedda, who are you staring at?" Singer didn't like the look on the author's face.

"Over there, with Hannah at her table. Those two men with her."

"Oh, my," said Agnes. "It's *them*."

Singer wasn't a great detective, but he was a good one. He didn't have to be told. The men were probably the two who had stolen Nedda's series. "It's them all right," said Nedda, her voice a ghostly whisper, confirming Singer's deduction.

"I don't believe it," said Agnes. "Now, Nedda, calm down. Maybe Hannah's involved in something else with them, nothing to do with you at all. It happens all the time in this business. I remember when one of my clients was suing David Merrick for reneging on a deal and at the same time David was sounding me out if the client was available to do a musical adaptation of *Mein Kampf*. You see what I mean, Ike? —Nedda! Don't make a scene!" She had her client by the wrist, holding her back on her chair. Calmly, she said, "That's not the way. That's not the way to do it."

Nedda fought tears unsuccessfully. Singer, embarrassed, stared

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into his coffee cup. Agnes patted Nedda's shoulder and signaled for the bill.

When she had regained her composure, Nedda laughed. "The hell with it. It's not the end of the world. I'm sorry, Ike. I think there's a story in your Cereal Killer. Can we get together on it? Are you interested?"

"Sure, maybe it'll make him surface again. How's for brunch on Sunday?"

"You've got a date. —Why doesn't the waiter clean up this mess? God, don't people realize there's no order in disorder?"

Agnes sighed as she signed the bill.

"I've got to make a phone call," said Nedda and abruptly got up and left them.

"It's a dirty shame," said Singer. "Too bad they had to run into each other here."

"It would have happened sooner or later. Nedda or I would have found out Hannah was involved on another deal with those thieves. There are no secrets in this business."

In the phone booth, Nedda was put through immediately to Lambert Warburton, her new lawyer. Hearing the urgency in her voice, he scheduled an immediate appointment. She returned to the table, where Singer was helping Agnes into her modest cloth coat.

"I'm going back to the office," announced Agnes. "Can I drop anybody?"

"Meaning us or a client?" asked Singer.

Agnes chuckled. "Let me tell you, there are two I'd love to bounce right now, but they're both such sweeties I wouldn't sleep for days if I did."

As the three moved toward the exit, eyes averted from Hannah Farley's table, Agnes asked Singer: "Are you any relation to a detective named Jacob Singer?"

"He's my uncle."

"He's not still with the Force, is he?"

"Hell, no. He retired years ago."

"He had a colorful career, didn't he? In the Twenties and the Thirties he was involved with a lot of celebrities. You know, Nedda, I think there's an interesting book there. I remember hearing about this case of his back in the Twenties that Dorothy Parker was mixed up in . . ."

After the three separated, Nedda walked the eight blocks to Lam-

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bert Warburton's office. It was a brisk autumn day, but Nedda's mood was wintry. In the elevator riding up to Warburton's penthouse suite, two people moved away from Nedda, who was unaware she was talking to herself. She didn't have to wait long before being ushered into Warburton's beautifully furnished office. It was neat, it was tidy, the pictures hung perfectly straight, and Nedda felt at home.

Warburton, who looked like a perennial presidential candidate who never won an election, rose to greet her. He listened to her litany of running into Hannah Farley with the two men she wanted to sue. Warburton, a master at the art of making sympathetic noises, made sympathetic noises. He could see Nedda was building up to a full head of steam and moved in swiftly to abort it with comforting legal phrases that she didn't understand, and on occasion neither did he.

"My dear Nedda," he began when she had finished, "I told you when you first came to me, and I'm telling you now, it may be years before we can get your case to trial."

"But why?"

"It takes a lot of preparation, Nedda—months and longer. There have to be pretrial examinations and—oh, lord, you can only understand if you've ever been involved in a case."

"I haven't. I'm not of a litigious nature."

"Even when we're ready, we have to wait until they can fit us into the docket. Believe me, Nedda, a lawyer's life is not an easy one."

You can't prove that by me, Nedda wanted to say but didn't—look at Hannah Farley, she even knows Barbara Walters. She stood up, thanked Warburton, shook his hand while he promised to stay in constant touch, and left the office.

Agnes phoned her that evening and they chatted about nothing important, except for Agnes urging her to get onto the possibility of a book about Ike Singer's Uncle Jacob.

Then Hannah Farley phoned.

"Don't you hang up on me, Nedda Maguire! How dare you insult me the way you did this afternoon! I know you saw me with Willoughby and MacIntyre, but that's something that has nothing to do with you at all! Did I know we'd be lunching in the same restaurant?" The tirade continued like a flow of hot lava from a newly alive volcano. Nedda envisioned her sitting in her vast, filthy living room, where inches of dust covered most of the furniture. She could

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never hold onto a cleaning woman, despite promises of lavish bonuses and early retirement with an excellent pension. Nedda listened without hearing. It was pointless to hang up on her—she would call right back and continue to call through the night. Hannah was notorious for her persistence. "Why don't we meet and talk this over like two civilized people?" she shouted.

When Nedda finally hung up an hour later, she went to a cupboard, found a bottle of vodka, and took a stiff drink.

The next day, when Hannah Farley didn't show up at her office for three important appointments, her worried secretary went to the Sutton Place building, where the superintendent admitted her to Hannah's apartment. They found the lawyer sitting on the couch in the living room with, ironically, the sterling-silver ice pick given to her by Alfred Hitchcock protruding from her heart.

"Oh, my God," gasped the secretary, "I think she's dead."

"Right on," said the superintendent as he dialed for the police.

Later that afternoon, Agnes Day was paid a prearranged visit by Ike Singer. She and Nedda had discussed Hannah's murder after having heard about it on the radio. ("I mean, however you feel about her," Agnes had said to Nedda, "it's a terrible shock. An ice pick in the heart! Well, at least it was a celebrity weapon. Nedda, are you all right?" "I'm perfectly fine," Nedda had answered, "and, no, I do not intend to go to the funeral.")

It was after that conversation that Ike phoned Agnes. Now he sat across from her smoking a cigarette, Agnes's secretary having provided cups of decaffeinated coffee and tacitly departed, closing the door behind her.

"What a coincidence, you being the detective in Hannah's murder," Agnes said.

"It's no coincidence. Sutton Place is my precinct."

"Well, much as I disliked her, I think it's tragic. Have you any clues?"

"Oh, I got a whole room full of clues."

"You do?"

"But no proof."

"How does that figure?"

Singer scratched his chest and said, "At lunch you mentioned having been to her apartment."

"Several times."

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"Tell me again what it was like."

"You mean besides the cobwebs on the ceilings and the filthy drapes and the layers of dust over everything, and unwashed plates with half eaten food and—"

"As bad as all that?"

"Worse."

"You'd think with all her money she'd have a maid."

"She's had hundreds, but her apartment was a dismaying proposition. There was a time when Bellevue Hospital was considering a plaque in Hannah's honor for providing them with so many stroke victims, heart-attack cases, and at least ten incidents of maniacal breakdowns."

"Well, Agnes, I'm going to describe the state of Hannah Farley's apartment when I went there, and then you tell me who might be the murderer."

Agnes was perplexed. She hated games. She couldn't watch game shows on television, they so unnerved her. Especially the contestants—she suspected they were bred by mad scientists purely for game-show appearances. She heard Singer speaking. "The apartment was spotless—spic-and-span."

"It was?"

"Yeah. It had been dusted from top to bottom. The carpets were vacuumed. The furniture was freshly polished, you could smell the lemon in the hall. The dishes were washed and stacked away. The bed was made all nice and neat. The place sparkled, Agnes. And the pictures, all the pictures were hanging nice and straight. You know, like somebody with this compulsion took over. All that was messy was the corpse, but of course that couldn't be helped."

Agnes had paled. Her mouth was dry. She held her hands clutched tightly together. She finally asked, "What are you going to do about it?"

"I really don't know, Agnes. You see, there's nothing but circumstantial evidence. The place was wiped clean. No prints, no nothing. Just everything bright and orderly. But I'll tell you," he laughed, "there was one cute touch."

"There was?"

"Yeah. In the kitchen. On the table. I found a plate of Corn Flakes and milk. Don't you think that was a neat touch?"

"Yes," agreed Agnes, running through her mind the names of some excellent criminal lawyers who might take Nedda's case, "real neat."

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a *NEW* Jonas Pickett story by

MICHAEL GILBERT

Sykes said, "Is that right that you managed to make Harmer see reason?"

"Sort of," said Jonas.

"It's more than I've ever been able to do."

"Do I gather he's your client?"

"He was. I guess he'll be yours now."

"I'm not looking for clients," said Jonas. "All the same, he sounds quite a character. I'd like to hear more about him."

"If he does consult you," said Sykes, "you needn't be afraid you're poaching on my preserves. Harmer's the bad penny. He gets passed round from hand to hand."

Jonas Pickett story #7, from the estimable and exemplary Michael Gilbert, this year's greatly deserving recipient of the Grand Master Award from the Mystery Writers of America . . .

HOLY WRIT

by MICHAEL GILBERT

In his youth, Jonas Pickett had been a keen golfer. When he qualified as a solicitor he had abandoned the game, as a distraction from the more important matter of making a living. Now he had been lured back onto the course.

"An old roué returning to the sins of his youth," said his secretary, Claire, uncharitably.

On that Sunday afternoon, Jonas had a game arranged with Ronald Sykes, a partner in R. & L. Sykes, who handled police court work. It was a fine April afternoon, with no threat of rain, and he had decided to walk. He was crossing the market square when he

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noticed the crowd at the far side. He could hear people shouting. He had lived long enough in Shackleton to guess what was happening. Well, it was not his trouble. Let them sort it out for themselves.

The town had once boasted three cinemas. Now only one remained open. One had turned itself into a dance-hall, the other had taken to Bingo. Claire, who kept him informed of all local gossip, had said, "I hear they've got permission to open on Sunday afternoons. It was a close thing in the Committee. A good deal of opposition from local fuddy-duddies."

"Absurd," said Jonas. "I play golf on Sunday. Why shouldn't they play Bingo?"

Claire had said, "Tell that to the Reverend Tobias Harmer."

The Rector of St. Michael's was a notable character—physically notable, being over six foot high, with snowy white hair, piercing eyes, and a nose like the beak of a bird of prey, and a menace to all in charge of local arrangements. Assisted by other earnest reformers, he had striven to clean up Shackleton. He was now engaged in demonstrating a one-man opposition to Sunday Bingo.

He had taken his stand, Jonas saw, on the top step in front of the doorway of the hall and was underlining his arguments with flourishes of a stick.

"You will find it written in the Commandments of our Lord that you keep holy the Sabbath day. Six days shalt thou labor and do all that thou hast to do, but the seventh is the Sabbath of the Lord, thy God. In it thou shalt do no manner of work—"

"Bingo isn't work," called an objector from the back of the crowd.

"A jesuitical argument, my friend. *You* may be amusing yourselves, but what about the people who are running the place?"

He swung round and a small man who had poked his head through the half opened door hastily withdrew it.

"It is in the sweat of *their* brows that you are pursuing your godless pleasures. Pray keep your distance, madam."

The crowd was divided. The people at the back looked on the whole thing as a welcome distraction on a dull Sunday afternoon. The front rank were hopeful Bingo players. They were angry.

Someone behind Jonas said, "If he hits anyone with that stick I shall have to take him in."

Jonas turned and saw Detective Superintendent Queen.

"Wouldn't want to arrest a man of the cloth. Couldn't you have a word with him?"

"For God's sake, Jack. He's not my client."

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"You could have a try."

"I've got a date at the golf club."

"Public order's more important than golf."

Jonas considered this for a moment. He saw that one of the ladies, a Mrs. McClachan, a leading light in the Women's Institute, was edging up to the Rector. Strife was imminent.

"I'll try," he said, and pushed his way through the crowd.

He had reached the top step before the Rector focused his grey eyes on him and said, "Who the blazes are you?"

"I'm a lawyer."

"Woe to ye, ye lawyers. Luke 11. 46."

"And because I'm a lawyer, I believe in the law. Every word of it, you must remember, has an exact and important meaning."

The Rector had allowed Jonas to get so near that he was inside the sweep of his stick and in no immediate danger. He leaned closer and continued speaking quietly, but firmly.

Surprisingly, the Rector allowed him to finish. Even more surprisingly he smiled, swung round, and said, "It would appear, ladies, that I was wrong about one point. A small point, but an important one." He bowed to Mrs. McClachan. "Enjoy your childish game, ladies. I'll not stand in your way."

The crowd parted and allowed him through. The rear ranks seemed disappointed at this tame conclusion. Noticing this, the Rector said, "Have patience, friends. The matter is not disposed of. Only postponed." And he stalked off down the street, swinging his weapon like a quarter staff.

"How the blazes did you manage that?" said Queen.

"I told him he was misquoting his own authorities. The seventh day *is* the Sabbath, but it's the Jewish Sabbath and that's not Sunday, it's Saturday."

"Well, blow me down," said Queen. "I'm most obliged, I'm sure. If he comes back next Saturday we'll have a few of our men here. And someone on the door a bit tougher than that rabbit Henshawe." He saw Jonas looking at his watch. "If you're late for your game, I'll give you a lift. My car's just round the corner."

Jonas was in time for the tee-off. He played less successfully than usual. His mind was on other things. Later, in the bar, where a garbled account of what had happened in the market square seemed to have reached the club, Sykes said, "Is that right you managed to make Harmer see reason?"

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"Sort of," said Jonas.

"It's more than I've ever been able to do."

"Do I gather he's your client?"

"He was. I guess he'll be yours now."

"I'm not looking for clients," said Jonas. "All the same, he sounds quite a character. Let's go over to the table in the corner. I'd like to hear more about him."

"If he does consult you," said Sykes, "you needn't be afraid you're poaching on my preserves. Harmer's the bad penny. He gets passed round from hand to hand. He started with Porter and Merriman, who normally conduct church business. But that didn't survive the cleansing of the temple."

"What are you talking about?"

"Well, you see, the trouble is there's no church hall at St. Michael's, so functions had to take place in the church. They had a stall just inside the door which sold postcards and books and religious stuff, and every so often they'd have a more ambitious affair, a sort of jumble sale—cakes and jam and sweets and cups of undrinkable coffee, the usual sort of thing. The Women's Institute ran it. The mistake they made was not telling Harmer what they were up to. It was early days. I suppose they thought he'd be as broadminded as his predecessor."

"Natural, perhaps. But foolish. What did he say?"

"He didn't say anything. He just threw everything out into the churchyard."

"Everything? Cakes and jam?"

"The lot. All among the tombstones."

"It must have made a terrible mess."

"It made a terrible row. Old Porter edged out of it by refusing to keep Harmer as a client. So he went to Smallpiece and Clover. I suppose young Clover thought he could handle him. Well, he couldn't. So he came to me. I've had him for nearly two years. Certainly kept us lively. There was no saying what he'd be up to next."

"Is he mad?"

Sykes considered this question seriously. Then he said, "No. In any legal meaning of the word he's unquestionably sane. The trouble is that he operates strictly by his own rules. Take the time he bought a second-hand car. When the time came to renew the license he was quite prepared to pay the road-fund tax."

"Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's."

"Exactly. But he refused to insure it. The Bible says, 'Take no

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thought for the morrow.' Insurance was taking thought for the morrow. Therefore it was forbidden."

"So what did he do?"

"Sold the car and bought a bicycle."

While Sykes pushed his way over to the bar to get them a second drink, Jonas thought about it. If the Rector did decide to consult him—and he had a feeling that he might—would he take him on? He would be a difficult client, but Jonas had spent his professional life dealing with difficult clients. The truth of the matter was that he was beginning to get very slightly bored. The firm had plenty of clients, but most of the ones who came to him personally were friends like Admiral Fairlie and Major Appleby. Very often, he suspected, they came for a chat as much as for a consultation. The real legal work was done by his partner, Sabrina Mountjoy.

The letter arrived three days later. It was formal and perfectly sensible. The Rector wrote to say that he had a small planning problem and wondered whether Mr. Pickett could help him. He had informed his existing solicitor, Mr. Sykes, who had raised no objection to his transferring this particular piece of business.

Jonas rang up Sykes, who laughed and said, "Over to you and the best of luck." The opposition came, though on different grounds, from Sabrina and Claire.

"There's no point wasting time over him," said Sabrina. "He'll be away before long."

"What makes you say that?" said Jonas. The discussion was taking place over the coffee that was a mid-morning ritual in the office.

"Congregation drifting off."

"Don't forget Lavinia Semple," said Claire.

Jonas knew about Miss Semple. He had often seen her, an untidy bundle wrapped in black, being trundled along the front in a bath-chair.

"Ronnie Sykes acts for her," said Sabrina. "He was telling me she makes a new will every month. She's the only daughter of Semple's Jams and Jellies. Rolling in money. Now *she'd* be a client worth having."

Jonas said, "We're not discussing whether I take on Miss Semple. The question was whether I should agree to act for the Rector."

"You can't do it," said Claire flatly. "The man's unbalanced."

Mrs. Mountjoy disagreed. "He's a very interesting man. And quite an accomplished musician."

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Claire scoffed. "I suppose if you'd lived at the time of Nero you'd have called *him* an interesting man. A splendid performer on the violin, too, I believe."

"The comparison is inapt," said Mrs. Mountjoy. "Nero was an evil man. Whatever else you may accuse the Rector of, you could hardly call him evil."

She enjoyed arguing with Claire, who sometimes lost her temper. Mrs. Mountjoy never lost hers.

Claire shifted her ground. She said, "The one I'm sorry for is David. It can't be any sort of life for him, alone in that gloomy house all day."

When they first arrived in Shackleton, she and Sabrina had both lodged at the Rectory for some months.

"And who is David?" said Jonas.

"He's the Rector's son. Didn't you know the Reverend Harmer was married?"

"I confess I thought of him as a prototype bachelor. Do I gather his wife has left him?"

"Not in the sense I think you mean," said Mrs. Mountjoy, with a sidelong look at Claire. "I'm told they were a devoted couple. His wife died eight years ago when David was born."

"All right, Sabrina," said Claire. "He may have been a rational creature eight years ago. All I'm saying is that he's not normal now."

Jonas said, "If the boy's eight, how come he spends all the day at home?"

"He doesn't," said Mrs. Mountjoy. "That was one of Claire's figures of speech. He's a day boy at Clifton House."

"Only after a year's bitter fight with the education authorities," said Claire. "The Rector maintained he could educate him better than any hired usher."

"Which he probably could have done," agreed Mrs. Mountjoy.

"All right," said Jonas patiently. "David's at school all day. What about the evenings? There must be someone who looks after the house."

Claire said, "There's a couple who come in when they're wanted. She cooks and cleans and he does the garden. But they were always out of the house by dusk, I noticed."

"I suppose," said Mrs. Mountjoy, "that they thought the Rector turned into a werewolf at night."

"Stop it, you two," said Jonas. "I want facts, not debating points. Aren't there any other members of the family?"

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"There's a sister," said Claire. "A Mrs. Baxter. The widow of Myron Baxter."

"The famous ornithologist?"

"Could be. She certainly seemed to know a lot about birds. When we were there, she was around for most of August. She used to take David for long walks."

"A woman of real intellect," said Mrs. Mountjoy. "She was up at Lady Margaret Hall a little before my time and we had a number of friends in common."

"There you are," said Claire. "Between her and the Rector, they could have given David a first-class education."

"And if he'd never mixed with any other boys he'd have turned out a first-class freak."

"Time," said Jonas. "Back to work."

"I read the other day," said Claire, "that the great Lord Coleridge was educated entirely by his father. He could read Latin when he was six."

"And look what a bore he was when he got onto the Bench," said Mrs. Mountjoy. She usually contrived to get the last word.

"You have to understand," said the Rector, settling himself in the chair opposite Jonas's desk, "that St. Michael's is almost entirely unendowed. The man who set it up supplied the funds to build the church and left his own rather unsuitable house as the rectory. Also some land. The money that was left over was enough to provide a modest stipend for the incumbent, but it left no reserve for repairs and the need for them is becoming urgent. I decided that the logical answer was to sell part of the land to a builder. I was told that, with planning permission, we could get as much as thirty thousand pounds an acre."

"Easily that," said Jonas.

"So I applied for planning permission for the four acres that front the Lewes road. It was refused. I was told that my only remedy was to ask for a public enquiry. That has been agreed—reluctantly."

"You conducted these negotiations yourself?"

"There was no need to trouble Mr. Sykes. I was fully cognizant of the facts."

"But now you want me to act for you?"

"It seemed to me, from the brief conversation we had in the market square—" a smile twitched the corner of the Rector's mouth "—that you were the possessor of a subtle mind."

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"I don't know about that," said Jonas. "But it's true that I've had some experience of planning appeals. Have you got a date yet?"

"Certainly. Next Monday."

"A week from now? We can hardly be ready by then."

"Is much preparation needed? I have brought with me the Town Clerk's letters. They are not lengthy. What else do you need?"

"We shall need witnesses, if we can get them. Local people, prepared to support your application. A week doesn't give us much time."

The Rector said, "In six days the Lord made the Heaven and the Earth and all that in them is." Interpreting Jonas's expression, he added, "Don't worry. I'm no William Jennings Bryan. I accept that the book of Genesis is a fairy story. But understand this, please. The Bible, the whole of it, the Old Testament as well as the New, has orders for us, if we can interpret them. I don't call them messages. I call them orders. Commands which are not always easy to understand. But when we do understand them—" the Rector's eyes were fixed on Jonas with almost hypnotic force "—we have no option. We are soldiers. We obey the orders of our commander."

Jonas's immediate reaction was, I wish I'd had my tape recorder switched on. He was being presented with an understanding of the Rector's mind which might be of critical importance in their future dealings. He objected, however, to being hypnotized and broke the spell by standing up. He said, "We've got a lot to do, so let's get on with it. Perhaps you could start by making enquiries of your neighbors to see if they might be prepared to help you."

They found Mrs. Baxter in the outer office. She was chatting to Claire, who combined the roles of secretary, typist, and receptionist and also shared duty on the telephone exchange with the office factotum, Sam Conybeare, who had been, among other things, a fairground boxer and a wall-of-death rider.

"Where's David?" said the Rector. There was an unexpected note of anxiety in his voice. "I don't like him to go out in the street alone."

"It's all right," said Mrs. Baxter. "He's talking to the lady in the other room."

David was sitting beside Sabrina, examining a sketch she had drawn.

"The wing feathers don't quite go like that. They go up at the end and they stick out more."

Sabrina amended the drawing with a few rapid strokes.

"Yes, that's more like it."

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"Come on, David," said the Rector. "These people have got work to do."

"He was showing me the difference between a kestrel and a sparrow-hawk," said Sabrina. "Very interesting."

When they were alone, Claire said to Jonas, "It's a pity Mrs. Baxter doesn't live with them permanently. She could keep some sort of eye on her brother."

"You've got a bee in your bonnet about that man," said Jonas.

"Then I wish it'd get out and sting you," said Claire tartly. "You don't seem able to grasp the fact that he's dangerous."

"Dangerous? Aren't you exaggerating? Eccentric certainly."

"Listen," said Claire, with more than usual earnestness, "people tell me things that perhaps they don't tell you. You know how he's been trying to get the amusement park on the pier shut on Sundays. Well, the first time he tried to do it by arguing with the man who ran it. When this chap wouldn't see his point of view—and possibly made some stupid crack—the Rector knocked him off the end of the pier into the sea and stalked away *without so much as looking round to see if he could swim.* Fortunately, he could. Otherwise he could easily have been drowned."

"So what happened?"

"Oh, it was hushed up somehow."

Jonas thought about this. Then he said, "Well, I should have been all right. I'm a good swimmer."

Claire said nothing. But later, to Mrs. Mountjoy, she said, "He's impossible. He's behaving like a small boy. He regards the whole thing as a dare. Other lawyers couldn't handle the Rector, but he can. He doesn't realize he's playing with fire. Couldn't you say something to him?"

"If he wouldn't listen to you," said Sabrina, "I'm certain he wouldn't listen to me."

The morning hearing of the Public Enquiry was over. The Rector had behaved with perfect propriety. Since he had not been able to find anyone willing to give evidence for him, he had had to act as his own witness.

The Inspector had a bad cold, which he relieved from time to time with a pastille. The opposition was represented by the Town Clerk, Mr. Timms, and Mr. McClachan, a member of the Planning Committee. Jonas had felt, from the start, that he was batting on a sticky wicket. He pointed out the desperate need of the church for funds

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and the equally desperate need of Shackleton for more houses. He touched on the suitability of the site and glossed over the fact that it was in the Green Belt, an area in which development is normally prohibited.

When he saw McClachan making a note, he guessed what it was about. This was the most serious weakness in their case. When he had said all he could, and some of it twice over, the Rector gave his evidence and the Town Clerk rose to cross-examine him. It was clear from his manner and from the way he phrased his questions that he was hoping to provoke an outburst. The Rector foiled him by answering as shortly as possible, sometimes simply by "Yes" or "No."

In the end, it was the Town Clerk who lost his temper. He snapped out, "Is it true, sir, that since you have been Rector of St. Michael's there has been a falling off in attendance at the church?"

"A small decrease, yes."

"If it's only small, how do you account for the fact, which appears in your own accounts, that the collections this year are fifty percent less than last year?"

The Rector considered the matter. "I think," he said gently, "that the actual figure is forty-two percent."

"If this decline continues, is it not likely that in the near future the church will be closed altogether?"

The Inspector, who had been showing signs of restlessness, said, "I fail to see the relevance of this line of enquiry, Mr. Timms." And to the Rector, "There is no need for you to answer that question."

"I have no objection to answering it," said the Rector. "What will happen in the future is neither in your hands nor in mine. It is in the hands of God."

His voice was still calm, but it was as cold as naked steel. It punctured the Town Clerk, who said, "I have no more questions," and sat down.

"In that case," said the Inspector, helping himself to another pastille, "it will be a convenient moment to adjourn."

During the lunch break, Jonas congratulated the Rector on his restraint. He looked surprised. "I could hardly go wrong," he said. "The instruction given to us in St. Matthew's gospel is explicit. If a man smite you on one cheek, turn to him the other."

"It certainly worked in this case."

"What is your honest opinion? Have we any chance of winning?"

"I think the Inspector is sympathetic to the needs of your church.

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Whether we can win depends on how well their witness has done his homework."

Unfortunately, it soon became clear that McClachan had prepared his case very thoroughly indeed. He was a qualified surveyor, with an intimate knowledge of Shackleton. He was able to identify six other sites which were ripe for development. Two of them were nearer to the center of Shackleton than the Rector's field and were outside the Green Belt.

"In short," said the Town Clerk, "although at some future date it might be appropriate to consider this site for development, your view is that, at the moment, it would be premature?"

"In my view, totally premature."

And that's one for your wife's cakes and jams, thought Jonas.

When Mr. Timms sat down, there was a long moment of silence. Jonas knew it was unusual for an Inspector to say anything after the parties had finished but that he sometimes helped them by indicating how his mind was working.

He said, "Mr. Pickett, you will appreciate the force of what the last witness has told us. I should like to say, however, that I am not unmindful of the needs of the church. Had this application been for some purpose connected with the church, a residence for a curate, perhaps, or a church hall, then my views on the matter would certainly be different."

While the Inspector was speaking, Jonas had become aware of a change in the Rector. He was no longer sitting quietly, but was tapping with one foot on the ground and his face was mottled. Now he was scribbling on a piece of paper. He pushed it toward Jonas, who read, written in emphatic capital letters: CAN I SAY SOMETHING?

Jonas seized his own pen and wrote underneath it, "Only if you no longer wish me to act for you."

The Inspector observed that something was happening. He turned courteously toward the Rector and said, "Have you anything you would care to add?"

In the silence which ensued, Jonas was aware of the struggle that was going on. The outcome depended on the strength of such influence as he had been able to establish over his difficult client. Finally, with a sound like the gasp of someone coming up from deep water, the Rector said, "No, sir."

"I think we'd better go back to my office," said Jonas. "I'll take you in my car . . ."

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When they got there, Jonas said, "I had a feeling you were going to be rude to the Inspector. Perhaps you could explain why."

The Rector, who had recovered his composure, said, "Tell me, Mr. Pickett, what would your opinion be of a parent who held out a sweet to his child, and when the child stretched out his hand to take it threw it into the fire? It is my dearest wish to build a church hall. It would solve many of my problems. The sale of those four acres of land, coupled with planning permission, would produce a hundred and twenty thousand pounds or thereabouts. And that happened to be almost exactly the amount a builder has quoted to me for the job. So what is the Inspector saying? That he would guarantee that I would get permission to put up my hall. That is the sweet. But equally that he could guarantee that I could *not* raise the money. So—"

The Rector held out one hand and opened the long thin fingers, as though he was dropping something.

At that moment, the telephone rang.

"I must apologize," said Jonas. "When my secretary and Sam Conybeare are both out, calls get put straight through to me. I'd better deal with it."

It was Ronald Sykes. He said, "I think you know I act for Lavinia Semple—"

"Yes, I knew it," said Jonas. "And I've got a client with me, so if you don't mind—"

"I think you ought to hear this. She died last night."

"I'm very sorry. But—"

"And she's left everything to the Rector."

Jonas swung round to look at the Rector, who had clearly heard what Sykes had said. He seemed unsurprised.

"Were you expecting this?" Jonas asked him.

"Miss Semple is one of the most faithful of my flock. She came to see me after morning service two weeks ago. She indicated what was in her mind. I besought her to do nothing hurriedly. I had no idea, of course, that she was to be gathered so soon."

The telephone said, "Are you still there?"

"Sorry," said Jonas. "The fact is, I have the Rector with me."

"Oh, I see." The reserve in Sykes' voice sounded a warning.

Jonas said, "Perhaps we ought to have a word about this."

"I agree," said Sykes. "And as soon as possible. I'd come to you, but I'm rather tied up at the moment. Could you possibly come round

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to my office?" He did not add, "without the Rector," but the implication was clear.

Sykes said, "One of Miss Semple's few remaining pleasures was the making and altering of her will. Normally, she told me what she wanted to do and I drew up the document. This time, as you can see, she tried her own hand at it."

Jonas looked at the paper on the desk. It was an old woman's writing—spidery, but absolutely clear.

"She's copied the legal wording from the last one I made for her. And it's been properly witnessed and dated. My brother and I are executors. We wouldn't anticipate any difficulty in getting probate."

"Then," said Jonas, "what's the trouble?" He knew that something was worrying Sykes. He had heard it on the telephone and he heard it again now.

"Well, you see, it's a big estate. There's property in London and the home counties. She couldn't dispose of that. It's entailed and goes to a cousin. What she's left the Rector is her free estate—money and shares."

"Yes, I follow that." Jonas picked up the will and studied it. A notion of what was upsetting his colleague crossed his mind. "It's the last five words, I suppose."

"If I had drafted the will I certainly shouldn't have put them in."

"To my old friend Tobias Harmer D.D., Rector of St. Michael's Church, Shackleton, I bequeath all my unentailed property as I explained to him."

The difficulty was becoming clearer.

"You mean," said Jonas, "that without those last five words it would be a gift to the Rector personally. With them, there's a trust tacked on."

"There's certainly a suggestion that she told him what she expected him to do with the money."

"So it could have been meant as a gift to the church and not to him."

The two lawyers looked at each other. The cat was out of the bag now, claws and all.

Jonas said, "What *is* the rate of tax?"

"As I told you, it's a very large estate. It might be as high as seventy-five percent."

"Which would be avoided if this was a gift to the church."

"Exactly."

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"But payable if it was a personal gift to the Rector."

"Yes."

"In that case," said Jonas, "the vital question is, what *did* she say to the Rector after morning service two weeks ago?"

With a layman, it would have taken Jonas three times as long to explain the point. The Rector's theologically-trained brain grasped the implications at once.

He said, "I see. Yes. So what is it you want me to do?"

"I want you to remember, if you can, the exact words Miss Semple used when she promised you this legacy."

"Why is what she said important? I thought it was only what the will said that mattered."

"Correct. But there's one exception. If a will is worded so that it can mean two different things, outside evidence is allowed to show which was meant. Particularly in the case of homemade wills, which tend to be vague."

"How much money is involved?"

"Sykes could give me only a rough estimate. Certainly not less than a hundred thousand pounds. More likely a hundred and fifty thousand."

The Rector thought about this for some time. His face was expressionless, but his fingers were opening and closing on the arms of the chair. Finally he said, "Very well, I can tell you what Miss Semple said. Not perhaps the precise words, but the sense of them. She said, 'You will understand that this money is for the church.' "

"Splendid," said Jonas. "That seems quite clear. I will draw up a statutory declaration."

"Explain, please."

"Oh, it's a solemn declaration which you swear to in front of another solicitor. I'm sure Ronald Sykes will be happy to oblige us. As soon as I've drafted it, we'll go round and see him."

"And if I am prepared to make this declaration, the whole of the money comes to the church. If I am unable to make it, three quarters of it may go to the government."

"In a nutshell," said Jonas.

"Just a formality, really," said Sykes, with professional cheerfulness. "Initial the first page. That's right. Then sign the document at the foot of page two. Excellent. Now you take the Testament in your right hand and we'll both stand up. Ready?"

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It was a copy of the New Testament bound in black buckram and limp with much handling. His clients normally grabbed the book and gabbled the required words. The Rector was the first person he had known to handle it with proper reverence.

Sykes said, "Please repeat after me, 'I solemnly and sincerely declare that this is my name and handwriting.' "

The Rector repeated the words.

" 'And that the contents of this, my declaration, are true.' "

Jonas, who had come with the Rector, had a sudden urge to interrupt, to shout out, "Stop!" He knew this was irrational and absurd. He had administered the oath to hundreds of his clients without he or they giving it another thought. The difference here, he realized, was that the Rector understood the meaning and implication of what he was doing. He was pledging his word to his God that he was telling the truth.

After a pause which seemed to go on forever but may only have lasted a few seconds, the Rector repeated, "And that the contents of this, my declaration, are true."

"That will cost you one pound," said Sykes.

Jonas had the fee ready and passed it across the table. They left the office and walked away down the street together. They had nothing to say to each other. Back in the office, Jonas found Claire waiting for him. She said, "You're looking very serious."

Jonas said, "Am I?" with unusual bruskness and disappeared into his own room, leaving Claire staring after him.

Three days later, toward the end of the afternoon, Mrs. Baxter arrived unannounced at the office. Claire could see that she was badly upset about something. Maybe it was the same thing that was worrying Jonas. He had been in a very odd mood lately. She said, "I'm afraid Mr. Pickett's out. If we'd known you were coming—"

"I'm glad. I'll find it easier to explain to you. Mr. Sykes and Mr. Pickett have done something terrible to my brother."

Claire didn't pretend not to understand her. She said, "You mean that statutory declaration?"

"I don't know what it was, but whatever they made him do it's destroying him. I was planning to go home yesterday, but for David's sake I had to stay. I daren't leave him alone."

Claire said, "Do you think your brother's mad?"

The brutality of the question shook her, as Claire had intended it to do. "Mad? I don't know. But I can tell you this. He hasn't slept

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for the last two nights. His bedroom's next to mine. Last night I could hear him pacing, backward and forward, hour after hour. That was bad enough, but it was worse when he stopped, quite suddenly. Absolute silence. I began to be afraid."

Claire said, in the same matter-of-fact voice, "You were afraid he'd killed himself?"

"Yes, I was. And I couldn't possibly go to sleep without knowing. So I opened the door quietly and looked in. He was on his knees by his bed. I went back to my room and managed to get a little sleep. This morning he's hardly spoken to me. Just 'thank you' when I got him his breakfast. I'm scared silly, Miss Rayner, and I'm not ashamed to admit it. Isn't there *something* we could do?"

"What about his doctor?"

"He hasn't got a regular one. And, well, I know he's got great confidence in Mr. Pickett. If you could only persuade him how bad things are, I'm sure he'd think of something."

"I'll try," said Claire reluctantly. "But don't bank on it. When his mind's made up, he's the most obstinate man I've ever known."

As was his custom on a fine afternoon, Jonas had been for a stroll along the front, and he came back refreshed and happy—a happiness which disappeared as soon as he had grasped what Claire was trying to tell him.

"Really," he said, in the querulous voice of someone who was arguing with himself. "All we asked him to do was to tell the truth, and even if he was lying he was doing it for the sake of his church, not for himself."

"Which will be a great comfort to everyone when he cuts his throat."

"If he's decided to kill himself, there's nothing you or I or anyone can do—short of putting him in a straitjacket."

"You don't often admit yourself beaten," said Claire. "You can usually think of a way out."

This was clever of Claire. It was an appeal to Jonas's professional pride. The result was that he stopped justifying himself and started thinking. He said, "I suppose it would help if we could take the pressure off him. I'll have a word with Sykes. If he hasn't put that declaration in yet, I could ask him to hold it up. Then, if the Rector agrees, we could tear it up and forget about it. It will cost him a lot of money."

"It might save his life," said Claire.

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"I'll go round to the Rectory as soon as I can get away tomorrow morning," Jonas told her.

It was nearly eleven o'clock next morning before he could leave the office. Sam had some stuff to pick up on the Lewes road, so he took him in the car with him. When they turned in at the long laurel-shadowed drive and drew up in front of the Rectory, there was no sign of life. Three rows of windows stared down at them like blind eyes. No birds were singing.

"Gloomy sort of place," said Sam. "Wouldn't care to live here myself."

"Something's happened," said Jonas. The silence was so overpowering he had to stop himself from speaking in a whisper. "I wish I'd come round sooner."

"Better go in and find out, hadn't you?"

"I suppose so." It was an effort to move.

"Like me to come along?"

Jonas took a grip of himself. "No," he said. "Stay here. But turn the car round."

He jumped out, walked briskly up the front steps, and jerked the old-fashioned bell pull. He could hear the bell jangling. But no sound of life.

He tried the front door. It was unlocked. He opened it and stepped through into the hall. As the last echoes of the bell died away, he heard something else. In the room at the far end of the passage someone was sobbing.

David was worried. His father had been his friend and his confidant for as many years as he could remember. Now something had happened to upset him. He could observe the physical signs, but without understanding what lay behind them. The fingers moving as though he was playing on a silent piano; the curiously distant look in the grey eyes; the livid wounds that had opened under them. His aunt, too, had been behaving oddly. She seemed unwilling to leave her brother alone for more than five minutes, but would come bustling in with plans and suggestions, most of them stupid in David's opinion. At breakfast that morning, whilst she had been there, almost nothing had been said. When she left the room, animation had returned.

His father had started to talk, entertainingly and informatively, about birds—about the cuckoo, who had just opened his spring

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solo—about the vanguard of the house-martins, who were ejecting the sparrows from the nests they had appropriated in the absence of their owners during the winter.

Better still, he had proposed an expedition.

"We'll take sandwiches and make a day of it. I thought we might go up Scarr Down. A boy told me there was a colony of chaffinches building there."

"Right up to the top of the Down? You mean the Druids' Stone?"

"Is that what they call it?" For a moment the animation had gone and the old bleak look was back in his father's eyes. With rare tact for a boy of eight, David broke off what he had been going to say—the gruesome but exciting things other boys had told him about the Druids' Stone. Instead he said, "Shall I cut the sandwiches?"

"I cut them before breakfast. They're in my knapsack."

"Shall I tell Aunt B what we're going to do?"

"No, I'll tell her. You get your windcheater. You'll need it up on the tops. Wait for me in the drive."

If David had shut the front door as his father had intended, he would have heard nothing. He rather wished he had shut it, because what he did hear was unusual and upsetting. First, it was the talk in the kitchen. It seemed to go on for a long time. Then, something he had never heard before, his father was shouting. Loudly and angrily. Between the shouts, he could hear his aunt's high-pitched protests. Then a door slammed and his father came striding back down the hall. He had his knapsack over one shoulder and a stick in his hand.

David said, "What was Aunt B going on about?"

"She thought the climb to Scarr Down would be too much for you."

"That's nonsense. I've been twice as far as that."

"So I told her, Davy. Come on then."

As they went, David slipped his small hand into the large one swinging beside him and father and son went down the drive hand in hand.

When Jonas reached the kitchen and looked inside, he realized that Mrs. Baxter was on the verge of a hysterical breakdown. As soon as she saw him she started talking, but nothing came out that made much sense.

He heard what sounded like "atonement," then something about the Druids' Stone, which was a monument he had once visited. Then, suddenly, out of the froth and jumble of words came two names that

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did mean something to him—Abraham and Isaac. When he heard them, all alarm bells started ringing together. He stepped forward, swung his arm, and smacked Mrs. Baxter's face with his open hand. The sobs were cut off and she looked up as though she was seeing him for the first time.

"Are you telling me," said Jonas, "that your brother has taken David up to Scarr Down?"

"Yes."

"How long ago?"

"About half an hour."

He said, "And you let them go? After he'd as good as told you what he meant to do?"

Mrs. Baxter raised a tear-streaked face. "How could I stop him? He's insane. I told you. We all told you. You wouldn't listen—"

But Jonas was no longer there.

Sam had turned the car and when he saw Jonas come running down the steps he started to move over. Jonas said, "Stay where you are. You're a better driver than me. We shall have to move fast."

"Where to, Skipper?"

"Scarr Down. Head for the golf club. There's a side road just before you get there."

By this time they were in the road that circled the Industrial Estate. A van pulled out ahead of them. Jonas said, "Pass it."

"Ho!" said Sam. "Necks for sale, is it?" He squeezed past the van, swinging in with inches to spare in front of an indignant car coming the other way. "If there's one thing I don't like it's drivers what sound their horns at you just because they're scared."

"Concentrate on driving," said Jonas. He was studying the map. "The turning's about two hundred yards ahead. Just past that white cottage. Got it? Right. Don't dawdle."

It was a country lane, clearly too narrow for cars to pass at speed. If they met anything head-on they would both go to glory. Sam uttered a short prayer.

"Next turning to the right."

This was a track, deeply rutted in places by the farm carts that had used it. The car bounced and juddered. Jonas realized that he could never have controlled it. His foot would have been on and off the accelerator and they would have been stalling and starting. As the track started to climb, there was a quagmire left by the recent rain. If they had not been going at a fair speed they would have been helplessly bogged. As it was, they had just enough momentum to

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reach the firm ground beyond and skidded out sideways. Sam wrenched the car back onto the track. For a stretch, though the track was going steeply uphill, it offered no obstacles.

Sam found a moment to grab a handkerchief out of his pocket and wipe away some of the sweat that was pouring down his forehead.

They could see the top of the Down now and the single stone standing up against the sky.

The footpath to the Druids' Stone ran, straight and uncompromising, up the shoulder of the Down. The man and the boy tackled it steadily, pausing from time to time to look back. As they climbed, their line of sight cleared the trees and houses and the sea came into view, lead and silver under the April sky. They seemed to have the world to themselves. Rabbits thumped on the turf and bolted back to their burrows as they approached. Above them, a hawk swung in the sky. He was not interested in the two humans toiling up the path. He was watching the rabbits.

"Nearly there," said the Rector.

Neither of them had spoken much. David was saving his breath for the climb. His father's thoughts were far away, in a country of his own making.

In an open circle of turf at the top were two stones, one flat, the other upright at the end of it. David said, "The boy who told you chaffinches built in a place like this must have been crazy."

The Rector sat on the edge of the flat stone, slipping the knapsack off his shoulders and putting it down carefully beside him. He said, "I brought you here to tell you something, Davy. Come and sit here."

David came over and squatted beside him.

"You know how much I love you. You know that you are more precious to me than anything in the whole world."

Most boys would have been embarrassed. David had lived alone with his father so long that nothing he said or did had the power to surprise or worry him. Instead he turned his attention to the important question of what his father had brought for their picnic. He fiddled open the clasp of the knapsack and looked inside.

The Rector had put out a hand to stop him, but realizing that it was too late he sat quite still.

David started to laugh. "Silly daddy," he said. "Do you know what you've done? You've brought the knife and forgotten the bread." He loved knives. This was a beauty, with a black handle, a copper tang,

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and a shining blade. His father took it from him gently and laid it down on the stone beside him.

"What were you going to tell me?" said David.

"We're going on a journey."

"You and me?"

"Yes. I shall be with you."

"Are we going far?"

"Very far." The words seemed to be choking him.

"And is that car coming to fetch us?"

The Rector leaped up. Standing, he could hear the sound of the car which had been masked by the slope of the hill and could see the dust of its passage.

It was heading straight for them.

The Rector said, in a loud voice, "Blessed be the Lord who has taken this burden from me! Run, David, quickly—see who is coming!"

David moved off obediently. He was worried because his father was behaving so oddly, but he wasn't frightened. He recognized Jonas and said, "Hullo, Mr. Pickett. I'd no idea you could get a car up as far as this. It must have been some drive."

"It was," said Sam grimly.

Jonas jumped out and walked across the clearing. At the far side, it fell away into a small cliff. He peered over the edge, swung round, and came back. He said, "David, I'm afraid your father's fallen and hurt himself. You must go back quickly with Sam to fetch help."

For a moment the boy hesitated. Then he said, "You'll stay with him, sir?"

"Yes," said Jonas, "I'll stay with him." And to Sam, "Bring Jack Queen if you can find him."

When the car had bumped off down the track, he went back to the far side of the clearing, parted the bushes, and looked over. Then he made his way cautiously down to where the Rector lay. The knife had been driven upward, under his ribs and into his heart. Both his hands were still clasped round the handle.

That evening, after everything had been done that had to be done, after Mrs. Baxter had taken charge of David and Inspector Queen had taken charge of the body, Jonas was sitting in his office with Sam and the office whisky bottle. He had poured out a second glass for both of them. He was thinking that one thing he would have to

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do was apologize to Claire for ignoring her repeated warnings. Tomorrow would do for that.

"Are you telling me," said Sam, "that he was going to kill that nipper?"

"Yes."

"For the Lord's sake, why?"

"Because he had sinned. And the only expiation he could make was to sacrifice his most precious possession. I've no doubt he intended to kill himself immediately afterward."

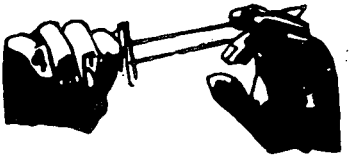
"And our arrival stopped him knocking off the kid?"

"I don't think it was quite like that. I think he took our arrival as a sign that he had been spared from making the sacrifice. What counted was his willingness to do it."

"Was that what happened in the story you were telling me about Abraham and Isaac?"

"It's some time since I read it," said Jonas. "But I seem to remember that in that case it was an angel who appeared at the last moment."

"Angels, is it?" said Sam. "That's a new one." He finished his drink thoughtfully.



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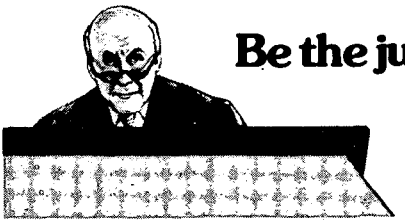

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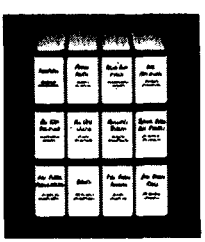

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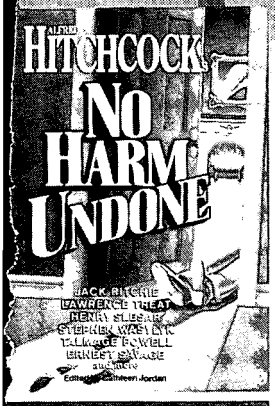

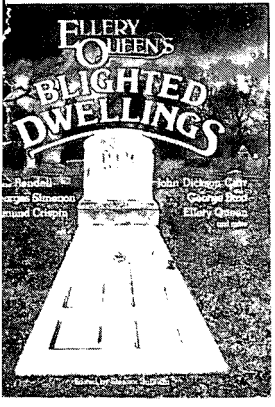

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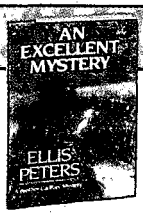

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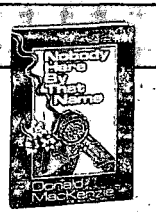

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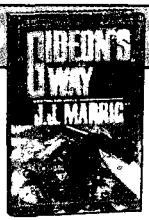

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